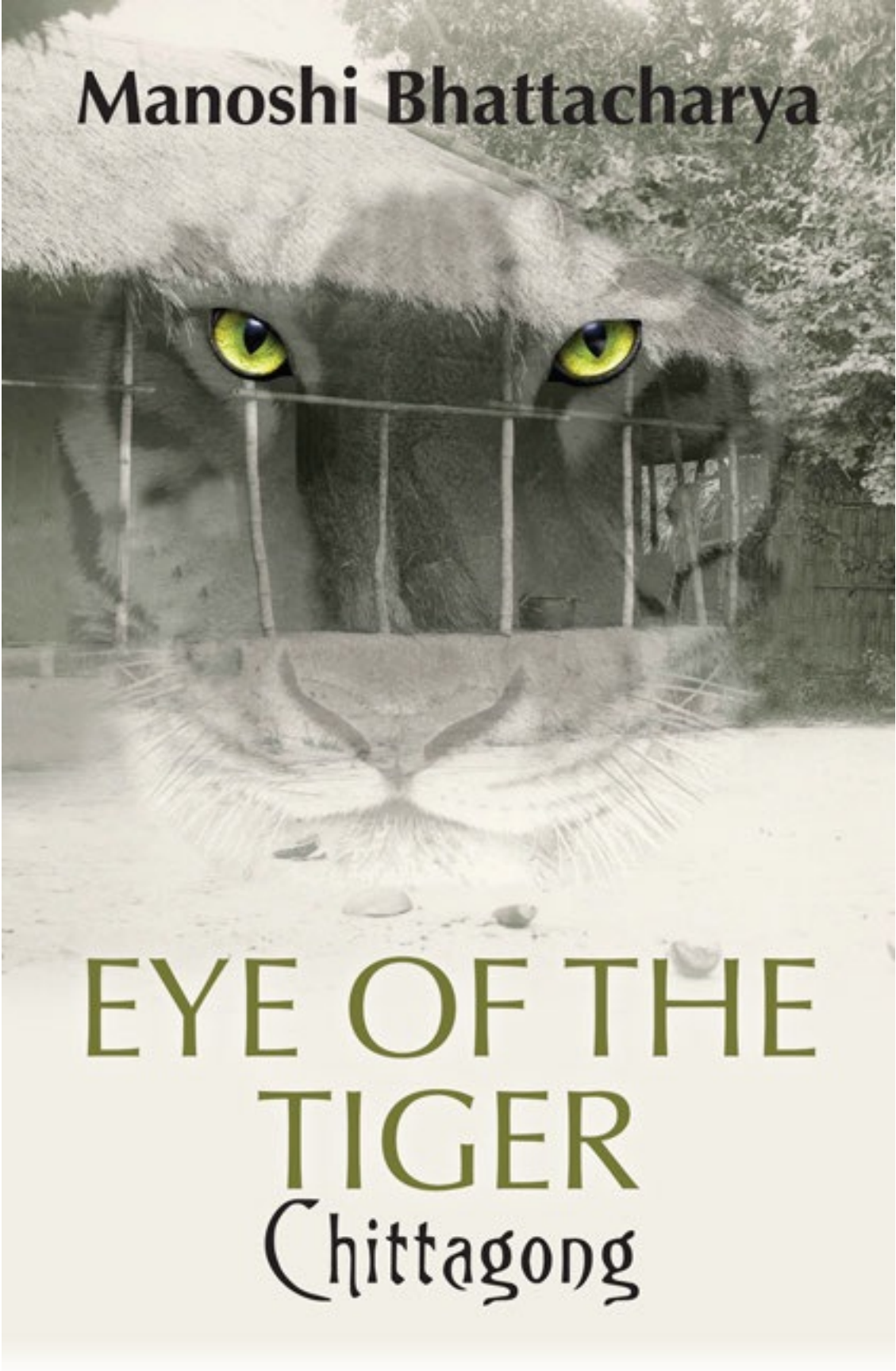
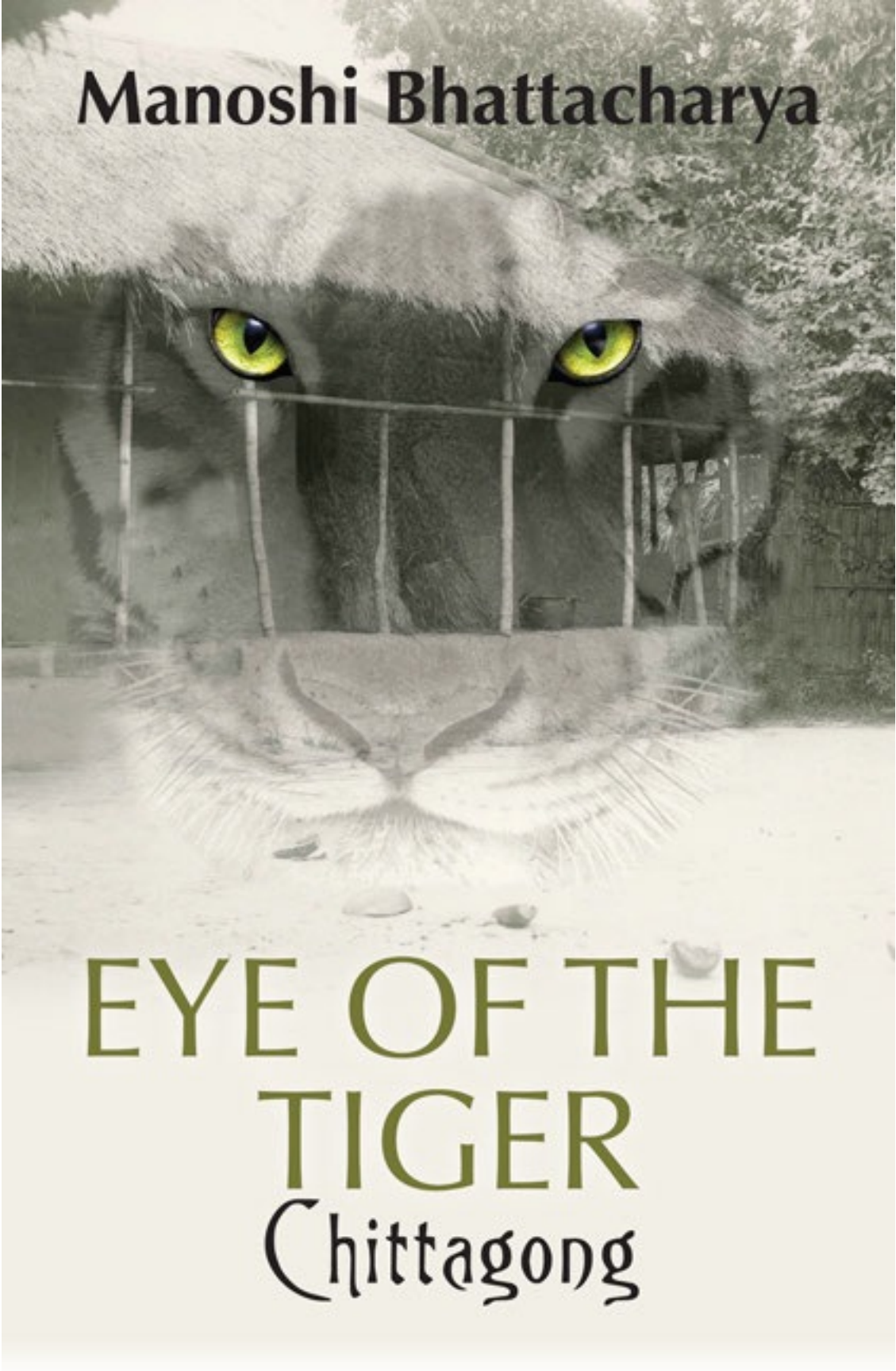


The image is a book cover. It features a sepia-toned photograph of a thatched-roof hut in a rural setting. Overlaid on the hut's facade is a large, detailed illustration of a tiger's face. The tiger's eyes are a striking yellow-green color, looking directly at the viewer. The tiger's whiskers are long and white, extending downwards. The background of the photograph shows some foliage and a wooden fence.

Manoshi Bhattacharya

**EYE OF THE
TIGER**
Chittagong

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CHITTAGONG

Eye of the Tiger

MANOSHI BHATTACHARYA



HarperCollins Publishers India

CONTENTS

[AUTHOR'S NOTE](#)

[THE STORY SO FAR](#)

[ONE](#)

[TWO](#)

[THREE](#)

[FOUR](#)

[FIVE](#)

[SIX](#)

[SEVEN](#)

EIGHT

NINE

TEN

ELEVEN

TWELVE

THIRTEEN

FOURTEEN

FIFTEEN

SIXTEEN

SEVENTEEN

EIGHTEEN

NINETEEN

TWENTY

TWENTY-ONE

TWENTY-TWO

TWENTY-THREE

TWENTY-FOUR

TWENTY-FIVE

TWENTY-SIX

NOTES

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GLOSSARY OF BENGALI WORDS

PEOPLE TELLING THE STORY

WHO'S WHO

TIMELINE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PHOTOGRAPHIC INSERT

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a true story crafted from personal memoirs, diaries, personal letters, secret police files, official speeches, newspapers, etc. The narrative style has been employed for the sake of easy reading and to preserve the style in which the revolutionaries first told their stories. A minimal amount of fiction has been used to create settings that enable the telling of side stories which cannot be accommodated in the normal flow. These fictitious settings have been meticulously researched and counterchecked with the families. This story belongs to the revolutionaries and the British officers and their wives. I have merely facilitated them and helped provide flow and continuity. Research material and songs that could not be accommodated in the text have been shared in <https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Summer-of-1930/181204375236724>.

THE STORY SO FAR

Two hundred years of colonial rule. 'Seven crore children,' mourns the poet, 'and the great Mother has brought them up to be Bengali and not men.' In the far eastern corner of India the cry reaches the heart of a simple schoolmaster, popularly known as Master-da Surjya Sen. He responds to the call of Anandamath and decides to show India the way. He would play the game the British way and if Chittagong could be freed for even a day, how difficult would it be for a united India to throw out the handful of foreigners that ruled?

What emerged was a plan so ingenious that it baffled the British, their police and army, the members of their Empire and the USA.

This is the inside story of Master-da's army and the British administrators who tried to unravel any plans before they could be brought to fruition.

Bright students from well-to-do homes in the city, like Ananda Prasad Gupta, are recruited. All Ananda understands is the need for tremendous secrecy. His mentors, Ananta Lal Singh and Ganesh Ghosh, give out information on a need-to-know basis. He is formally initiated by Master-da himself. It is a moment of elation and disappointment. The legendary Master-da is an ordinary man. What leaves a lasting impression are those eyes and that lovely deep voice. There is no initiation ceremony like ones that had been rumoured. A simple interview and that is all.

He then realizes with a shock that his older brother has been involved with the movement for some time. And there is little that his brother will reveal. He does not fully understand the plan but watches as some friends, Tegra, Himangshu, Motilal and Jibon, are recruited. But he cannot fathom why equally worthy candidates have not been approached. Unknown to him there are similar recruitments taking place in other parts of the city and the villages. Lessons are being imparted in physical training, boxing, martial arts, driving, hunting and shooting.

Ram Krishna Biswas, with his saintly leanings, is recruited from a village by Phutu-da. Ram Krishna is given the charge of Suresh De, a city lad of moderate

means, for Master-da recognizes Suresh's weakness for the finer things of life and his resultant attraction to the wealthier boys like Ananda. Suresh is segregated and tutored in accordance with his personal needs. For his initiation, he receives a mantra from Master-da. Every member, we learn, is being studied and trained according individual needs.

Watertight secrecy and a strict hierarchy are the mainstay of success. The top leadership alone knows the entire plan. The first rankers know fragments of the plan that is relevant to them and their immediate team. Some first rankers are team leaders, some have been reserved for the first phase of the operation and the rest for the successive phases. The second rankers know absolutely nothing and nobody but their mentor. They follow with the simple zeal of faith in Master-da and their mentor. All they know is that they have sworn away their lives for the cause of the great Mother, India. It is 'do and die'. The last event is to be death and for that they are amply prepared.

Why did Master-da plan it this way? Because, he knew that despite good faith and patriotic fervour, not every boy, if caught, would be able to hold up under torture. Limiting the information being given out to the boys limited the chances of jeopardizing the overall plans.

Four story-tellers pick up the thread in turn and tell the Indian side of the story based on their knowledge and experience. Ananta Lal Singh, a member of the top leadership, talks with deep insight; Ananda Prasad Gupta and Ram Krishna Biswas, first rankers from the city and from a village respectively, have observations and questions, while Suresh De, who belongs to the second rank, narrates in a simpler and more romantic style.

Though some women have been trained, interacting with them is forbidden according to the dictates of Anandamath. The first phase of the operation belongs to men and boys only – the ones that have no affiliations with women other than their mothers and sisters and are prepared to die.

Two seasoned British administrators, both old India hands, take on the mantle of story-teller for the British camp. They are far from unsympathetic for these mature men understand the land and her problems just as they understand mind of the youth that is struggling to break free. Sir Charles Tegart, police commissioner of Bengal, a veteran of World War I, is as southern Irish as one can get. Bengal is in the hands of an 'old Shinner' but one who believes in

independence for Ireland and yet desires nothing but a friendly union between her and the Empire. Can such a man ever be the enemy of India's freedom? And few are better equipped to understand what the mind of the bomb-and-pistol-wallah is groping after. For the revolutionaries and Sir Charles Tegart, it is a game of chess. His life is in constant danger but he is determined to maintain peace in Bengal. But the time is ripe for trouble and he can sense it. The Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1925 is due to expire on 1 April 1930. The police would once again be without the benefit of special powers. 'Keep a very close watch,' he commands his Bengali and British officers. He holds his men in great esteem. The Bengali, he says, is given to brains rather than brawn and does not take kindly to the discipline and order of a hard life; at the same time he lacks neither courage nor ability, and shines in the higher ranks.

An elaborate system of watchers and agents fan out through the districts. Special arrangements are made for the ones that have the most potential for trouble. Chittagong is one of them. Informers are cultivated from amongst trusted members of revolutionary groups that can be identified. Master-da's group is one of them. Sir Charles is known for the creation of this network of agents and spies. Their lives are at great risk for the revolutionaries will kill if they suspect a member to be an informer. Keeping his agents safe is top priority and he will not hesitate to get involved personally.

But Master-da's counterintelligence department is not to be underestimated. Ananta Lal Singh and Ganesh Ghosh identify the informer within their group and decide to use him to their advantage. The police are led to believe that the group is preparing an innocuous protest against the salt law. Meanwhile, arms are bought from within Sir Charles Tegart's own realm where the buyer fears that the seller may be a police agent and the seller is wary of the buyer as well. Bombs are manufactured in-house and weapons training imparted. The activities are fraught with danger and as is expected accidents do take place. The injured have to be treated and all traces of illegal activity concealed from the police and their agents.

The call comes on 18 April 1930. And the boys respond. They had been mooning about their homes waiting for this moment. Most parents are unaware that their sons have left, taking the family firearm without permission. The ones that get to know plead. But all logic has cogent counterarguments. Lokenath and Tegra's mother puts her foot down. Tegra is too young. Lokenath leaves without his brother. Tegra changes out of uniform to comfort his mother. When her back

is turned he escapes, dressed in his everyday dhuti and shirt.

The Police Line Armoury is captured, the AFI armoury gutted, telephone and telegraph lines disrupted and train tracks rendered unusable. What the British first took to be a native wedding celebration soon has them petrified. Many families are rushed on board steamships that are moved to the middle of the river, ready to steam out into the Bay of Bengal while the men rush around with hosepipes trying to contain the fires. One tiny armoury has been left untouched by the rebels. Police Superintendent J.R. Johnson rushes to take charge of the machine guns and with the aid of the gunner launches a hail of bullets upon the rebels now isolated within the Police Lines. It goes on until he runs out of ammunition.

Master-da raises the Swaraj Pataka and declares independence. The Police Lines have to be abandoned and the top leadership is aware that the second phase is to set into motion. They are to set fire to the Police Lines Armoury building, march into the city where a dinner of mutton curry and rice await the boys at Makleshwar Rahman's restaurant. The pamphlets declaring independence would by now have been distributed to the citizens of Chittagong. They would be arriving by the droves to join the movement. The jail would be emptied and banks seized. The British would bring in their army and then there would be that last glorious battle, that fight unto death. They would all be martyred. The world would get to hear and India would have been given the message.

But all is not well. Two missions have not been accomplished. The attack on the European Club which was intended as revenge for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre is not successful as it is Good Friday and the sahibs retired early. Next and more devastating, the AFI armoury ammunition that they depended upon has not been located. Without it the Lewis guns are useless. They have no weapons with which to arm the citizens, who are now expected to come forward. Further, the British had struck back with whatever resources they could muster. And lastly Ganesh Ghosh, the military commander, has fallen ill.

The last act before leaving the Police Lines is to torch it. Himangshu, who has been trained for the job, accidentally sets himself on fire. The boys rush to help and act without thinking. Ananta Lal Singh will later blame what is to follow on extreme exhaustion. He and Ganesh Ghosh take the burnt Himangshu and drive back into the city. The boy runs off home and is followed by Ananda Prasad Gupta. Ananta realizes he is alone with Ganesh and Jibon. He cannot really

recall when Ananda and Jibon had got into the car with them. He drives home. Expecting a police backlash his parents have abandoned their city home and left for an unknown destination. Here the three wait for Master-da to lead the army into the city. But the army fails to appear.

Seized with doubts Master-da, Nirmal Sen and Ambika Chakraborty have abandoned the plan and gone off into the hills. The rest follow willingly assuming that it is part of the plan. Ananta, Ganesh, Jibon and Ananda find themselves estranged from the main army.

The British army does not enter Chittagong as expected. For three days Chittagong lies abandoned. Abandoned by both vanquisher and the vanquished. A skeleton force of volunteers comprising tea planters arrive the next day from Silchar to boost morale and secure the bank and treasury building.

John Younie is due to take over as the new district and sessions judge for Chittagong. He is on his way travelling with his family when he receives the news at Barisal. Leaving the family in a friend's care, he reaches Chittagong two days later. His arrival is preceded by the arrival of the army from Dhaka. Aircrafts are pressed into service to locate the rebels, who are assumed to be a hundred strong. John Younie finds Chittagong in the grip of terror reminiscent of a scene straight out of Peshawar: men in uniform sleep with rifles chained to their wrists. 'What,' he wonders, 'has driven the litigation-loving Bengali to turn his gentle green valley into a pocket edition of hell?'

For three days Master-da's army sends scouts to locate the estranged military commanders Ananta Lal Singh and Ganesh Ghosh who have with them Ananda Prasad Gupta. For three days the estranged party search for their army. But as fate would have it they miss each other. On 22 April, the army decides to turn back and return to the city for that last battle. And at the same time the estranged party decides to leave that very night for Kolkata as the city is by now armed to the teeth.

The rebels are located on Jalalabad Hill on the evening of 22 April. An armed police regiment backed by the army and civilian volunteers mow the hill down with three machine guns positioned on strategically situated peaks. The youthful army of freedom fighters retaliate with gusto. Then they suddenly discover the guns silenced and the British armed police and army gone. But ten are dead and three near dead. The survivors pay their respects to the dead, pick up their

wounded and leave for the villages where first rankers allotted to the second phase of the operation help them to shelters. The revolutionaries slip into hiding and await the call signalling the start of the second phase. Some boys are sent home to await the call. While some find family willing to help them hide, others find their fathers have already reported them missing.

The armed police return with fifty men the next morning and discover to their horror, not a hundred dead or wounded, but ten dead, among whom are Tegra, the first martyr; Bidhu Bhattacharya and Naresh Ray the recently qualified doctors; Tripura Sen; Nirmal Lala, the youngest of the revolutionaries; fleet-footed Pulin Bikash Ghose. Motilal dies before their eyes and Ardhendu Dastidar later in hospital. Unknown to them, Ambika Chakraborty, the last of the taken-for fatally wounded, had crawled under a bush. Realizing that taking the bodies back to Chittagong would only serve to inflame passions, the police burn the bodies at the site. This is Ananta Lal Singh's band, they realize. Rumours fly: Ananta Lal Singh is a Sikh deserter from the army. No connection is made with Master-da.

On the night of 22 April the estranged party are nearly caught at Feni Railway Station. They succeed in shooting their way out but in the process Ananta Lal Singh is separated from the group.

Lady Kathleen Tegart and Dorothy Younie are aware that they live in times in which history is being made. They keep meticulous records and try to understand the events by digging right to the roots. The British Chittagonians rage against the incompetency of their police and government in having allowed such an outrage to take place under their very noses and permit such a skilled and disciplined rebel army to be raised and trained, one that achieved complete success in its objectives in the town and then, undeterred by the unexpected arrival on the scene of a Lewis gun, did not forthwith proceed to scatter into hiding but marched off into the hills, still a united disciplined force. Inquiries are ordered and arrests begin.

Kalpana Dutta, who has been trying for months to meet the elusive Master-da and join up as a revolutionary, takes a final decision. She performs her own initiation ceremony.

ONE

ANANDA PRASAD GUPTA

‘I had a minor mutiny on my hands.’ Ganesh-da sat cross-legged on the bed. Ananda smiled wanly, his face flushed with fever. Beside him, on the sprawling bed, lay Makhon. They were both coming down with the pox. The bed occupied most of the little one-room house in the Khidirpur busti, in Kolkata. They rarely ventured beyond those four walls, spending most of their time on the big bed and, though they had been introduced as relatives to the multitudes that peeped in through the door and windows, their hostess would not permit them to lift a finger. She was a busy schoolteacher with no help at home. With her husband’s help she managed the cleaning, the cooking and the washing up. When the day ended, Kanchanlata kakima drew her two little boys to one corner of the room where they slept on the floor while her husband occupied the other corner. This Christian family had responded to Bhupen Dutt’s¹ request and, without a single question, had opened their home to whom ... well they did not exactly know. All they knew was that in doing so they were serving their country.

Ananda swallowed painfully. His throat felt raw and sore. He shut his eyes, reliving those horrific moments in the train when the constable seemed about to stumble upon his real identity. And then the shock that went with Ganesh-da’s sudden whispered orders: both of you hand over your firearms to me now and make your way to Kolkata. While Ananda had choked on this remarkable new order, Makhon had rounded on Ganesh-da, registering determination from top to toe. They were not about to leave each other’s side – not after what had happened at Feni. Nevertheless, thinking it over, the two youngsters had realized the wisdom in his words. They had escaped the last time only because the police were looking for a group of four. It made sense to break up and just in case they were searched, the police were unlikely to view unarmed youngsters with suspicion. Ganesh-da, Ananda knew, had a better chance of making a getaway in case he was accosted, since he would have just himself to look out for. It was a longish stop at the Badarpur junction and they had all decided to get off. Ananda

and Makhon were to catch another train and make their way to Sylhet, and Ganesh-da was to rush to borrow some money from a cousin who lived in the railway quarters in the vicinity, run back and board the train once again.

‘We were busy legging it across when a sahib with twelve sidekicks, all armed with magazine rifles and bayonets, appeared from out of the blue.’

Everyone smiled. Ganesh-da was embellishing the story for the benefit of the two patients.

‘Halt.’ Ganesh-da drew himself up and threw out his chest. He puffed up his cheeks and blew into his lush, invisible moustache. ‘We walked up to him all meek and innocent.’

‘Kidhar jata?’ Ganesh-da gave a sudden yell. ‘The sahib,’ he explained, ‘was accustomed to conversing with stray Indians at a range of two hundred yards in a high wind.’

Mamar-bari ... uncle’s house, sahib.

Why through here? He bawled.

Short cut, saar.

Suitcase kahan?

Poor man, saar. No suitcase.

Usmey kya hai ... the sahib was pointing at the bundle.’

‘I thought the thudding of my heart would give us all away.’ Makhon closed his eyes wearily.

‘See, saar.’ Ganesh-da pretended to drop to the ground and dragged an imaginary bundle before Ananta-da. ‘Cloth, saar. Aur kuch nahi, saar.’

The Englishman had been reluctant to harass a poor traveller. He had let them go with an ‘achchha theek hai, chala jao’ ... go on then, move it.

‘We reached Sylhet the next evening and Ananda’s mashima arranged fresh

clothes for us.' Makhon filled in the rest of the story. Sumati Majumdar was the district inspectress for schools and she had lost no time in pulling out all her savings, all of Rs 108/-, for her nephew and his friend. 'Then we came to Kolkata and got in touch with Anukul-da.'

It was all very simply said but the two youngsters had lived in Kolkata in the lap of luxury. They had been put up in the house of Kalicharan Ghose, the author of The Roll of Honour, and Sarat Chandra Bose, the famous barrister and older brother of Subhas Chandra Bose, had handed over his personal car and driver so that the boys could be moved from one hideout to another in safety. Anukul-da had told them about the benefactors in a voice choked with emotion. Men of Sarat Babu's stature were ready to take on risks such as this in Charles Tegart's own realm.

Their host's little boy had walked in to clear the dirty plates, for Kanchanlata kakima had expressly warned them not to do any of the washing. She and her husband kept a sharp lookout for strangers moving about the busti who could be policemen in disguise or their agents. The Kolkata Police were in a state of alert. In addition, friends, fired by the Chattogram news, hoping to get in touch and join the action, were on the lookout. The host family took the responsibility of shielding their guests, who were now worth some Rs 16,000/-, from friends and foes alike.

However, they would have to move soon because of the chickenpox; it could assume epidemic proportions in a busti as tightly packed as this one.

The stories had been told over and over again for there was little else to do. Ganesh-da had arrived at Kolkata and had headed straight for the Jugantar office looking for Bhupen Dutt who led the Kolkata team. Bhupen-da had wisely gone into hiding, the moment the Chattogram news had been broken, anticipating the arrival of the Jugantar Chattogram members. He would have to avoid being arrested if he was to assume responsibility for the young men who would most certainly look to him for refuge. These were strange days, for the press was on strike. An article written by Bhupen-da entitled 'Dhanya Chattogram' or Glorious Chittagong in the daily Swadhinata had sparked the controversy. The paper had been declared illegal and to scotch so-called rumours, for the Salt Tax Aandolan was in full swing, the government had imposed restrictions on the vernacular papers. In a show of solidarity, all newspapers had stopped printing, leading to the spread of even wilder rumours being printed and distributed from

secret presses.

Ananta-da, true to his style, had a dramatic escape posing first as a lunatic and then as a deaf and dumb person, until he had reached the house of his father's old schoolmate at Kumilla.

LOKENATH BAL

Swaptadwipa samudrer oi prantey

Heritechhi aha koto na konkal

Sei konkaler shaathey aaj koribirey khela?

Beyond the ocean of seven islands

I gaze upon numerous skeletons

Will you play with them today?

An extempore recitation was in progress. Rajat had struck a particularly sombre note though it hadn't wiped off the smiles from the faces. The boys, Lokenath knew, had come up with a grand plan. Debu, Mona, Swaraj, Phoni, Subodh and Rajat were bent on finishing the work that had been left undone.

Purbo prantey dekha dilo

Taruner biplober bela

Aaj o ki aashey nai,

Aaj o ki hoi ni somay

Aay aay nishongshoye

In the east is a glimpse

Of the first light of revolution

Has he not come yet?

Is it not time yet

Come come without hesitation.

Nirmal-da came down the stairs. ‘Master-da has given it his nod. You boys may go ahead.’ There was some subdued cheering which was hushed at a signal. Someone was on his way in.

Mahendra walked in and glanced angrily round the room. He appeared to be in a foul mood and did not appreciate having Lokenath and the others around.

‘Come,’ said Nirmal-da making his way back upstairs. ‘Master-da is waiting. There is rice in that plate there. Uncover it ... begin eating ... we can listen to what you have to say while you eat.’

‘I am not hungry.’ Mahendra’s sullen reply was heard quite clearly downstairs. Rajat cocked an eyebrow at Lokenath.

‘Tell us,’ came Master-da’s voice. He was not worried about being overheard.

‘Anil Ghose has been arrested in the city. Over the last three to four days there have been several arrests: Ashutosh Bhattacharya in Anowara, Nitaipada Ghose in Jessore, Noni Deb from Double Mooring, Sripati Choudhury from Akyab, Ranadhir Dasgupta from Nashyam Haat.’

‘Is Binoy safe?’ Nirmal-da’s voice faltered. ‘If he is under suspicion, we must leave Koyepara.’

‘And where will you go?’ Mahendra snapped back. ‘Our friends are busy spilling their guts the moment they see a police baton. They have not left us with one safe place. Let me turn myself in. You send me a revolver and I will get rid of all the traitors.’

‘Calm down. Boys under torture may not be able to hold up. I know it is not acceptable but that is no reason for you to turn yourself in.’ Master-da spoke in patient tones. ‘If such a job is to be done we have many friends sitting in jail who will do it for us. Now I don’t want you to go towards the city any more. Look for another shelter in the villages.’

‘All villagers are being questioned: do you know Lokenath Bal? His pictures, his descriptions are up everywhere.’ Mahendra’s voice was caustic.

PREMLATA

The girl leant against her aunt’s knees, her head stretched as far back as possible with her hair firmly in the grip of her aunt’s fist. A pot of deep yellow mustard oil poured in a steady stream on the top of her head and was trapped by the masses of thick black hair. The head shook vigorously as fingers worked the pungent oil deep into the scalp, driving it from the roots to the tips of the silken lengths. The girl sniffed constantly as the vapours worked their way into her eyes and tickled her nostrils.

The massage over, the coil of hair was yanked back further until Premlata rested her head fully on her aunt’s lap and looked up into her face. The brown face with its full lips and rounded nose that belonged to her aunt was said to be the likeness of her own. She was staring into the future still some fifteen years away. Her aunt’s fingers worked in light strokes against her cheeks until they were cleaned of their oily coat. As a final measure they clamped themselves against the bone of her nose in one last desperate attempt to mould it into a thinner higher bridge.

Meshomoshai, her aunt’s husband, had just set foot on to the flat portion of beaten earth that lay between the bamboo and mud hut and the outside door.

‘Go,’ said her aunt giving her a push. ‘Remember to pour water directly on to the centre of your head.’

Premlata tugged at the end of the thin cotton fabric of her sari, tucking it firmly at the waist and set off, grabbing a little cousin on the way. Her uncle’s voice floated across.

‘The boy has agreed. He walked in as I was giving the parents a good sounding. It was really most irresponsible of them to give their word without taking his wishes into account ... after all we had agreed to go ahead with the wedding even though we knew of his history ... but all that is in the past now. He has agreed. There is only one condition: he will not give up his chosen path and Premlata will have to accept it ... at least we have not lost face before the relatives ... cancelling the wedding after making the announcements!’

‘One look at his pretty bride and mend his ways, he will.’

Premlata did not dally to hear more. She responded to the urgent tug at her hand and the cousins went skipping through the fields towards the khal. She was to garland a revolutionary ... one who had returned victorious from battle with the white demons. He was a man with an education and employed at the storehouse of the Economic Engineering Works. His private tutor had employed him as an assistant and entered his name in the register with retrospective effect from 1 April 1930. Her hero was quite safe.

‘Didi, why are you smiling?’

‘Nothing.’ Premlata righted her face quickly.

The wedding of Premlata and Kali Kinkar De duly took place. The conch and the ululation drove away the evil eye as Premlata dropped the paan leaves in her hands to take her first look at the tall bespectacled young man who was now her husband. He mouthed the name which would be hers henceforth. She was to forever remain his Priti.

ANANTA LAL SINGH

They had been moved. He did not know their exact whereabouts, except that they were somewhere around the Shraddhananda Park area. Nor had he any clue as to who their hosts were and it was better this way. Bhupen-da had arranged for a final-year medical student to make house calls and attend to the two patients.

Ananta changed the wet muslin on Ananda's forehead and checked his temperature. The fever was high and the boy restless. Makhon was better that day and on his feet, though red spots marked the areas where a fresh crop of vesicles threatened to emerge. Ganesh had not fully recovered either and scabs still marked his arms. Ananta decided to entertain them.

'Imagine the surprise when the mute begins to speak. The driver was in turn struck speechless. I realized how foolish I must have looked, for here I was asking for the famous Kamini Dutt of Kumilla when it was clearly obvious that I carried no papers, no bag ... then what could I possibly want with a lawyer of Kamini Babu's stature? Fortunately, he did not question me and did as I requested. Noni-da, arrey Kamini-kaka babu's son, opened the door. His eyes opened wide and then became wider and he whisked me in without uttering a word. He paid off the bus driver and sent him off before returning to greet me. The words tumbled out of him in a rush: no one had been caught in the Feni encounter and the Noakhali zila magistrate had offered a reward of 1,000/- per head for the four unknown culprits; since then the citizens had been asked not to walk through the main streets after nine o'clock at night and no Indian passengers were allowed on night trains travelling at the speed of fifteen miles an hour;² the Chittagong district magistrate had offered Rs 5,000/- per head for the five leaders; a big battle had taken place at Jalalabad and the station workers had said that two trains carrying injured policemen had passed through Kumilla sometime after midnight. How had he just assumed that I would have been involved?' Ananta groaned.

Both Ananda and Makhon made an inarticulate murmur that might either have meant half-hearted protest or deep sympathy.

'Well, to cut a long story short,' sniffed Ananta-da, 'Kaka babu arrived but he did not send for me. I waited alone in my room, growing more and more anxious. Then Noni-da came at about ten o'clock and escorted me to the library. Kaka babu ... he is a big man,' Ananta gestured with his hands, 'with a big presence ... and seeing him made my heart go thump. With him were two other

men. But on seeing me, they got up and hugged me ... I was so relieved. The bearded man was Maulvi Makleshwar Rehman, the Kumilla zila Congress secretary, and the other, Vasant Majumdar, one of Kumilla's richest zamindars and also my father's classmate from his school days. They sat down on the sofa but not I; I chose to sit most respectfully by kaka babu's feet on the carpet. Kaka babu did not waste time in small talk. He knew everything and came directly to the point: I was to stay with Maulvi Makleshwar Rehman at the Congress office on the nights of 28, 29, and 30 April. On 1 May I would leave early in the morning by car to Daudkandhi ghat on the Meghna in the company of Maulvi Abdulla, another Congress worker. We would take a boat to Bango Bazaar, then walk to an obscure ferry point some seven miles away, catch the ferry that would come in from Fatulla on its way to Narayangunj, catch a train to Bahadurabad, then another steamer to Fulchori, and finally a train to Sealdah which would reach by four in the morning. Then I was to take a taxi to kaka babu's youngest son Sanjiv Dutt's house in Shyam Bazaar. He is a third-year medical student. He would take charge of me and hand me over to kaka babu's younger brother Naren Dutt, the owner of Bengal Immunity Ltd, who would then figure out the rest.

'I left the next day with Maulvi Makleshwar and spent the next three nights glued to him like a shadow: we ate from the same plate, even slept on the same bed. The maulvi just could not get enough of my stories. Noni-da came early, taking care to park his car some distance away. Dressed as a Muslim, in a lungi and a red fez, I hopped in. At the last moment, instead of returning with Noni-da, Maulvi Makleshwar Rehman decided to accompany Maulvi Abdulla and me all the way to Bango Bazaar. At last, most reluctantly we parted company ...'

Bhupen-da had arrived with the doctor. Sitangshu Sarkar was a final-year student at the medical college. He was extremely professional and spoke very little. Handing out some pills for the fever he left, promising to return the following day. Sitangshu had not said a word but Ananta had recognized him instantly. He was the son of Police Inspector Shirish Chandra Sarkar. The family had, many years ago, when Sitangshu was a student of class three at the Government Collegiate School and Ananta a class five student at the Municipal School, lived as one of their many tenants in Chattogram. It was best not to broach the subject or reveal himself.

Ganesh took charge of handing out the medication and picked up the thread of the conversation. 'Your Ananta-da was offered a stable job at the Bengal

Immunity Ltd.’ He laughed. ‘A stable job in a research department! One that would keep him safely out of police notice and out of trouble. You can imagine how he panicked.’

‘But let me tell the story.’ Ananta determinedly dragged the conversation back from the direction it threatened to deviate to. It was great to be back together. His thoughts went back to the moment he was reunited with Ganesh in Kolkata – the flood of relief at seeing him again and without a scratch on his body. It was quite a miracle that they had both escaped unhurt. Julu-da, the person he once had reason to distrust, had led him from house to house and finally to Bhupen-da’s shelter where Ganesh was in hiding. Bhupen-da had asked who opened fire and Ganesh, who had heard the story from Ananda and Makhon, had pointed towards Ananta. Bhupen-da had turned and embraced him. The memory of it still evoked a flush of pleasure. During the course of the day, he had met Purnendu, Ardhendu Dastidar’s elder brother, and Monoranjan Rai whom most knew as Kebla-da or the silly one. But neither of them could throw any more light on what was already known. Twelve had been martyred at Jalalabad but no one seemed to know who they were. News was hard to come by.

‘Let me tell you about the storm on 1 May. I stuck to Maulvi Abdulla as best as possible but every time he sat down for namaz I moved away. I would roll out my mat and pretend to be absorbed in the namaz prayers but I needed to be away from him so that it did not become apparent that I was copying him. At last, the steamer arrived to take us to Narayangunj. With much whistling it weighed anchor and set sail. Suddenly, a cloudlet, no bigger than a man’s hand, that had followed us innocently all day, grew bigger before our very eyes until it covered the whole sky in one dark and angry mass. And the pleasant breeze that had accompanied us freshened into god-knows-how-many-miles-an-hour wind, with a few introductory crashes of thunder. A gigantic storm fell on us. The waters churned, tossing the vessel violently about. The alarm was sounded and the khalasis ran back and forth like mad men taking off the canvas that had been set up on the upper and lower decks to shield the passengers from the onslaught of the rain. Passengers were being requested to herd together in the centre, some were being dragged by impatient khalasis, heavy luggage was being moved down to the hold ... all around there was shouting, screaming and the wailing of women and children that drowned the chanting of the names of Hari and Allah. Thunder rolled continuously, pealed, rattled and crashed while lightning flared ceaselessly. Swift vicious streaks of blinding pale-blue flares lit up around us. We were in the grip of a shrieking inferno. It was impossible for this huge vessel

to move ahead against the opposing winds; the small lifeboats on the side had begun thrashing about as the waves crashed into them. Two hundred yards away lay Narayangunj, but we stood paralysed. The serangs, fearing that the steamer would crash into the jetty and be reduced to splinters, chose to drop anchor and wait out the storm. A second one was dropped for the heavy chains were crackling, as if about to snap. We remained in that position for one-and-a-half hours and it was only when I picked up a newspaper the next day that I realized the scale of destruction: many launches and boats had sunk off Chandpur, jetties had broken their chains and floated off ... and a steamer the size of the Gwaland Steamer had been picked up by the wind and deposited a mile away on the top of a hillock. That day we got off the steamer, wrung our clothes as best as we could ... there was no point in changing, for the rest of our possessions were all sopping wet ... and made our way to a Muslim inn close to the railway station and joined the other guests at the table ... you know the long low kinds, about ten inches from the ground piled high with kormas, kebabs and bakarkhanis. It was all you could eat and at just one rupee per head.'

The talk of food did not fail to lighten the atmosphere and the boys exhaled deeply at the thought of the redolent spicy meaty kormas. But the one story that Ananta was not prepared to share was that of the night he spent with his old acquaintance Sukumar Biswas, the nephew of his old colleague and brother-in-arms, Premananda. He was a Chattogram lad, a resident of the Nandan Kanan area, who had long given up contact with the revolutionary societies, moved to Kolkata and opened a restaurant. He had gone to meet him soon after his interview with Naren Dutt. He had to move out of Shyam Bazaar for he simply could not comply with Naren-kaka's views: Those that have returned from the front line need to keep themselves safe while the others come forward to do their bit. He could not accept the post of researcher at Bengal Immunity Limited and, instead of getting into arguments, thought it best to disappear quietly. Ananta had borrowed Sanjiv's bicycle and wristwatch and set off to meet Anukul-da for news of Ananda and Makhon. It was a risky business, for Anukul-da's home would be among those that would be watched. Still going by the principle of no-risk-no-gain, he had taken the chance. Then he had set out for Sukumar's restaurant. He had seemed pleased enough to see him and had taken him to meet Julu-da. There a decision had been taken that Ananta would spend the night with Sukumar. Worried that he may be recognized by Sukumar's family, who now occupied the top floor of the Brahmo Samaj Upasana Hall at Bhawanipur, the two of them planned on sleeping downstairs on the benches. Julu-da agreed to assume responsibility from the next day onwards. As they ate their maangsho-

poroatha dinner, Sukumar let Ananta on to a secret. Special Superintendent Nalini Majumdar, who was a distant relative, had called for him and asked him to inform the police if he received news of Ananta Lal Singh. He was a simple lad with a clear conscience, but the information had jarred. That night as they lay side by side upon their benches, Ananta had kept a firm grip upon one end of Sukumar's dhuti. He appeared not to have noticed – else, he would have been mighty offended.

In the morning, they left to meet Julu-da who instructed Sukumar to return the cycle and the wristwatch to Sanjiv Dutt and led Ananta away. Once out of earshot he had whispered: Never go back to that house in Shyam Bazaar again. The Upasana Hall had been surrounded all of last night by white-clothes men ...

Ananta shuddered at the memory, uncertain of what the message was and who it was that should not be trusted. If the police had become aware of his presence, why had they not burst in and arrested him? That he would be staying with Sukumar at this location was known to only Julu-da and Sukumar. Was it because he had been hanging on to Sukumar ... was Sukumar an agent? Ananta had not given him the chance to create a diversion without exposing himself. Was there a second agent?

JOHN YOUNIE, 10 MAY 1930

‘Gandhi-ji Ki Jai!’ ‘Bande Mataram!’

The cries came across the water from the small boats that bobbed up and down, keeping an eye on the official launch that flew the Union Jack aloft as it came in to dock at Chandpur. The European family, accompanied by two dogs, walked rapidly towards the railway station, leaving the Indian staff to unload.

‘A good many people must have looked up the atlas to locate this never-before-heard-of-spot,’ whispered Dorothy, as she reached out to John who had not emerged from the station.

‘The women and children here have lived on a boat in the harbour for nearly a

week,' he kissed her cheek and lifted Helen and Mary into his arms. 'Extremely good of Donovan to lend you the use of his boat. The police have been hard put to arrange for the safety of the station – the place is stiff with Gurkhas. There is a very powerful organization behind the raid and it is still much feared ... Nevertheless my dear, it is sometimes bracing to be living dangerously.' He was glad to have them by his side again but it had been with some trepidation that he had arranged for their arrival.

The convoy waiting at the Chittagong station escorted them to the judge's house. Helen and Mary sat with their noses pasted against the window panes, struck by the sight of soldiers marching down the streets. Dorothy peered anxiously. 'Truth be told,' she said, 'should I not be arranging for my plate to go up in some nice quiet village at home so that I could keep the pot boiling, even if humbly at least safely for the whole family. Those cries – "Ghandi-ki-ji (sic), Bande Mataram" – they are still ringing in my ears.'

John hugged his wife reassuringly. 'Hail Mr Gandhi! A complete antithesis to Bande Mataram, the prayer to the motherland – the signal for revolution used by the ones that believe in violence. With Mr Gandhi's arrest recently on 4 May, emotions have been whipped up³ ... mobs out on the streets ... completely unaware of the reasons for the agitation.' He laughed at the expression on his wife's face. 'Since April, the government has launched a countrywide crackdown arresting the leaders of the civil disobedience. The younger Mr Nehru has been in jail since 14 April and a number of leaders were arrested the day after the encounter at Jalalabad. A sorry state of affairs, that encounter. I understand from Johnson that Farmer has been writing plaintive letters to Lowman about his absence from the spot, the futility of leading raids into the jungles where one has to creep along for miles in single file unable to see beyond a yard and the difficulty in getting anyone to go in to get khabar.⁴ By 25 April, he had wanted to set the forest on fire ... to flush out the rebels. Fortunately, Col Dallas Smith shot it down judging the undergrowth to be too green. The colonel, after much effort, succeeded in getting a plane sanctioned and it carried out two sorties on 30 April and on May Day but without result.⁵

'The air force has not been of much help either and neither was the good colonel's launch patrol⁶ that was to catch the rebels attempting to slip across the rivers. DIB men and some planters have been reporting sightings but the forces rushed to the spot return each time with the invariable "without any result" report. Johnny's search parties have returned after searching about seventy

houses across the river without the least vestige of success⁷ on account of which the employment of a temporary typist has been necessitated to cope with the extra typing! ⁸

‘The Hindus wont talk and the Muslims are unwilling to incur the displeasure of the H’s as the Government is of no real consequence at the moment.’⁹ In Johnny’s words, “as long as Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh, Nirmal Sen, Surjya Sen, Ambika Chakraborty and Lokenath Bal are at large there might be some further outbreak”. ¹⁰

‘Anyway, with the arrests of the top Congress leaders, Peshawar erupted, rallying for the release of the Frontier Gandhi – Mr Abdul Ghaffar Khan. His non-violent Khudai Khidmatgars had until now been a sobering influence on their blood-feud-loving Pathan brethren but with their Badshah Khan’s arrest there was a massive upsurge with crowds defying armoured cars and intensive firing that had gone on for three hours. A platoon of Garhwal Rifles, all Hindus, refused to open fire on the rioting Muslims. Order wasn’t restored until 4 May. And now there has been a tribal incursion which, instead of looting the villages as usual, has come up with an unusual demand.’

John held up his index finger, ‘The release of Badshah Khan. Malang Baba or the naked fakir meaning Mr Gandhi,’ his middle finger was raised and as the ring finger came up he broke down laughing. ‘... and Inquilab ... Inquilab ...’ Moisture squeezed out of the corners of his eyes. ‘Those simpletons, they think Inquilab is another great leader whom everybody constantly wishes a long life.’¹¹

‘Inquilab Zindabad!’¹² Dorothy’s features had relaxed. She was sitting back more comfortably now.

‘It’s not going to be so bad. This place has many good points: a more bearable climate and amenities and though it takes a lot to combat a Bengal September in the plains – it can get poisonously mouldy and sticky out here – but once it’s cooler, you should be able to go off with the kids to the seaside. Cox’s Bazar is no more than eight hours by boat and the mothers and babies make quite a party of it.’

A large bungalow with a shingled roof and a long wide verandah stood overlooking the golf course on the Paltan Maidan. Helen and Mary ran to claim their bedroom. Dorothy inspected the house and its kitchen hutments making

notes that would be handed over to Mr White at the PWD. Fortunately, the staff had been with her since Khulna and knew her likes and dislikes. And most importantly, old Johur, the butler, who had disappeared when she first arrived as a new bride only to miraculously reappear every time she went back home to Britain, had remained steadfastly by her side since the arrival of Helen and Mary. And now with the advent of Elspet, the old man had dug in his roots.

John walked by her side, examining the beds in the vegetable garden. 'Never quite the same as that first time, is it?'

Dorothy's introduction to India had taken place in Krishnagar. It had been John's first posting as district and session's judge of Nadia district and the new bride had found herself in an ancient house, left over from the days of the indigo planters. The approach had been through two magnificent avenues, one lined by casuarina trees and the other by debdars.¹³ At her disposal had been thirty large rooms spread out over two storeys with wide verandahs, spacious servants' quarters within the compound, an endless garden with the inevitable chicken-run at the bottom.

'The greatest drawback of life in the hot weather and the rains,' he continued, 'is the absence of good vegetables. The flowers will wilt and the tomatoes will be struck down by the same relentless hand. Carrots, cauliflowers, tomatoes, peas and lettuce will turn into memories and how creative can one be with green beans, tasteless native cucumbers, sweet potatoes and those silly green tasteless pods which, for some unaccountable reason, have been called lady's fingers?'

'And Mr Shakespeare had once sighed that summer's lease hath all too short a date,' said Dorothy. 'Perhaps we could get down to planting a little patch of mokhai, the Indian corn. The heads can be turned into a pleasant breakfast dish or a siccun¹⁴ before they turn hard and ripe.'

She gazed fondly at her husband. I have made up my mind, he had written when moving to Barisal, that I will not stay in court after five except on special occasions. It is no good wearing oneself to a shadow and in the end getting precious little thanks.

His noble intentions had collapsed almost instantly on his arrival and the letters that had followed in those years of separation complained of relentless hours engaged in, as he put it, one bloody murder after another. What was Chittagong

going to bring?

TWO

KALPANA DUTT

The servants in the kitchen had a great story that day for their didimoni. Surjya Sen had been caught at Potiya village! Two hundred, no, three hundred armed men had cordoned off Surjya Sen's house all night and in the morning had demanded the landlord identify himself.

Surjya Sen. The landlord had vehemently established his identity

Surjya Sen? Which Surjya Sen?

Master Surjya Sen.

The man had been dragged away, arrested and the Intelligence Branch informed. Officers had rushed from Chittagong. They had got Surjya Sen all right; only this one was the local headmaster.

'They will have to borrow some brains if they want to catch the real Surjya Sen.'

Kalpana joined in the laughter. Sightings were few and made for great conversation. People would go into minute descriptions of the time they had caught a glimpse of Surjya Sen. Some, she guessed, were going to lengths to amuse their audience. She was home for the summer vacations. In the three weeks since the raid, the face of Chittagong had changed. Jumping to her feet she ran out. Her mother's voice was calling to her: Priti had come.

They had been friends since their schooldays. Pritilata Waddadar was a year ahead of her and was home for the holidays from Dhaka University.

'So now your skin has finally cleared.' Kalpana's mother stroked Priti's brown cheek. 'Baba! Bhulu, did you know Priti has scored the highest among the girls and has stood fourth among all the girls and boys put together? Wait, I must be

the first to put a sweet into her mouth. And what a pair of tomboys the two of you were at school!’

Kalpana squealed and hugged her friend. The suntan had long been left behind on the badminton courts of Khastagir Girl’s High School where they had been forced to play under the burning sun during the tiffin recess; for that was the only time the senior girls would let them use the court.

What dreams they had dreamt then ... from miniature ranis of Jhansi, to fearless revolutionaries and eventually to the more tame ambitions of winning the Premchand Raichand Scholarship¹ to Calcutta University. Both had attended the women’s conference in May 1929, organized by the Surjya Sen-led district Congress committee. Then there had been a sad parting, for though Priti excelled in her studies, it was mathematics that had let her down. Without the scholarship, Calcutta University was beyond her means and Priti had been forced to take up literature at Eden College, Dhaka, instead. But the long letters that went up and down between Dhaka and Calcutta kept them together in spirit. They exchanged notes on the improvement societies they had joined: Priti, the patriotic Deepali Sangh and Kalpana, the Girl Student’s Society started by Kalyani Das.² Both had opted to take up lathi and swordplay.

The girls disappeared into Kalpana’s room. The maid followed them with tall glasses of pale-green roasted mango sherbet and plates of sweets. Adjusting the folds of her coarse handwoven sari, Priti settled herself on the bed and putting aside the delicate lace napkins, placed a plate on her lap. ‘I will get through Bethune this year,’ she said confidently, ‘and we’ll be together again.’ She inspected the sweets and picked out the sandesh and pantuas and turned to the maid. ‘I am going to stuff myself this holiday. Here take these back.’ She handed back the plate of chocolate fudge. ‘Have you not fried any of the little savoury nimkis?’ The little maid, who was in the process of settling on to the floor to listen to the didimonis chatter, grinned and went back to the kitchen to fetch some. Kalpana self-consciously tucked her lace-edged petticoat out of sight.

‘I met the other two yesterday.’ Priti’s voice had grown solemn. ‘Too soft ... don’t you trust them ... they will desert at the first chance.’

Priti had not changed, thought Kalpana. There was still that intense brooding air about her friend, something about the wide nose and mouth that bespoke a mule-like stubbornness. Once she had decided on a path, she would not budge, and

despite the fact that Kalpana, or Bhulu as she was called at home, towered over her, Priti treated her like a younger sister that needed a firm guiding hand.

‘I guess so,’ she murmured. The four of them had gone picketing, during the last vacation, to their old school: all Chittagong schools and colleges were being encouraged to join the strike. The school authorities had banned their entry and the two girls had returned the next day to apologize to the principal.

Priti’s family believed in the swadeshi dream. They would use nothing that was foreign and it sometimes made Kalpana feel a little small, for hers was as anglicized as an Indian family could get. We will change the pledge one day – from ‘to be loyal to God and the king emperor’ we will make it ‘to be loyal to God and country’ – Priti had once whispered during a Girl Guides session at school.

‘Come spend Pujo in my house this year.’ Priti broke in on her thoughts.

‘Do you serve sacrificial meat?’

‘No,’ she shuddered and laughed. ‘I couldn’t bear to watch a slaughter.’

‘I could. I am pretty sure I could do it.’ Kalpana raised both hands and brought down an invisible kharga. ‘There is nothing to it.’

The laughter was suddenly gone from Priti’s face. ‘When I have to give my own life for the country’s freedom, I will not hesitate but,’ she grimaced apologetically, ‘I will not be able to kill a poor helpless creature just like that.’

ANANTA LAL SINGH

They could not move to a safer location until Makhon and Ananda had recovered. They were still sick and Sitangshu Sarkar continued to make his visits. In a couple of days the fever disappeared and the lesions began to crust. No fresh crop appeared and Sitangshu was satisfied. The boys were well on their way to recovery. His normally reserved countenance had relaxed and one day he mentioned having spent a couple of years of his childhood in Chattogram. He

had been the neighbour, he said, of the much-in-news Ananta Lal Singh.

‘I knew him when I was quite small. He was always getting into trouble.’ Sitangshu smiled at the memory of the little boy whose self-appointed task was to award justice. ‘He wasn’t a bad child, one could see that his heart was in the right place ... it was just that he was unappreciated by the world of adults.’

Makhon and Ananda were hanging on to every word, glee written all over their faces. They had not heard any of this before.

‘Golab Babu would come home from court collecting complaints about his youngest all along the way. His son could sniff out quarrels and present himself within hours to declare his decision and award punishment, and as a result complaints varied from – babu, your son beat me with a stick or your son boxed my son’s ears – to more serious complaints from adults like, babu, your son has threatened to beat us if we do not sort out our quarrels with the neighbours or babu, your son has threatened to burn our hut if we do not go and apologize to the residents of the Muslim busti.

‘Golab Babu would walk into the house muttering and pronouncing death sentences. His wife would greet him at the door with her usual worried countenance and another string of complaints: Nura’s little boy was caught peeing on the road ... His daughter would come into announce that Ananta had once again beaten the servant boy for sleeping during the day. Taking off his coat and tie Golab Babu would holler: “Anant Lal, idhar aao!”’

Sitangshu had captivated his audience. It was clear that he had not made the connection and it was forgivable, for they had moved away from Chattogram many years ago. His grandmother’s face flashed before Ananta’s eyes. The old lady would hug him protectively, rocking back and forth as if to mesmerize him and whisper into his ears, coaxing him to give up his naughty ways. She was his father’s mother and always spoke to him in Hindi, for their ancestors were Suryavanshi Rajputs from the Hindi-speaking region of Agra.

‘Golab Babu spoke to his mother and his wife in Hindi and used Bengali with the children except when he was disciplining them,’ continued Sitangshu. ‘But if anyone dared so much as to suggest that Ananta was not a true-blue Bengali, he had had it.’

Ananta was enjoying every moment of it but he knew that the embarrassing part

was about to come. There was no stopping Sitangshu now that he was in full flow.

‘Golab Babu’s discipline was legendary – stand straight with your back to the wall. Now bend over ... lower ... still lower, now hold that position. Golab Babu would leave the room to change out of his office wear. He would return in a while, dressed comfortably. One could hear him coming for he wore wooden sandals with a knob that was held between his toes. He would take his chair and thrash out each complaint: So the servant boy was sleeping after finishing his work instead of playing with you on the field? What business is it of yours if he prefers to sleep instead of being duronto like you? Now tell me what happened with Nura’s son? Nura is a good man, he will not be making unjust complaints ... and so it went on until it was time to award punishment. Thirty lashes. Now go touch your mother’s feet and beg forgiveness and then go out to the garden and break a nice long branch from the guava tree.’

The room was bristling with suppressed laughter. But, for Ananta the injustice of it stung even to this day. For Baba would watch through the window as Ananta selected a branch: not that one, no not that one either, bring that narrow flexible one. He could still remember its handiwork on his outstretched palms and on the soft flesh of his naked butt. It would be accompanied by encouragements: ro mut ... do not cry; I don’t want to see a single tear. Now tell me do you still want to set fire to that man’s hut? ... Fortunately, Sitangshu did not venture further into the topic.

But as he got up to leave, he started on yet another tale. ‘Ananta was once locked up for a month in his room. Only his sister was permitted to meet him and that too to take him for his bath and bring him his food. Poor Golab Babu, what else could a father do? He was perpetually investing in good-quality canes to discipline his youngest with. But Ananta, there was no stopping him.’

A tight-lipped Ganesh saw him to the door. Bhupen-da had sent some disturbing news: Amarendra Nandi had been shot dead in Chattogram city; there were no more details.

LADY KATHLEEN TEGART, MAY 1930

A figure in a khaki shirt and shorts paused to look in at the shop window of Hall & Anderson that stood on the main thoroughfare of Chowringhee, near the right-angle turn to Kyd Street. The wooden shutters of the three large windows had been opened early in the morning and through the glass, one could admire the interiors of the shop: tablecloths embroidered with cutwork or edged with lace displayed on little peg tables; longer ones hung from the ceiling draped artistically around the furniture; cut-glass fruit bowls laden with waxen fruit arranged seductively and a tray with a decanter and liquor glasses placed on the right-hand corner of the window ledge. The figure, a tall, big-built man stood, contemplating the new arrivals in glassware. A young Bengali slipped up from behind with a revolver in his hand. He continued shooting even after his victim had collapsed.

A strangled scream rose in Kathleen's throat and the sharp stab of pain in her abdomen made her break out in a sweat. The nurse leant over, patting her face gently to wake her. The sterile white of the hospital room gradually came into focus as Kathleen sipped the water the nurse offered. Since the appendicectomy, the nightmare had recurred everyday without fail. The figure in her dreams was her husband but in reality Gopi Nath Saha had killed Mr Earnest Day. Mr Day had been able to give a brief account before he died. Gopi Nath Saha had been tried in the Calcutta High Court and executed on 1 March 1924. But soon letters signed by the president-in-council, Red Bengal, had arrived in the post. The others who got them were the magistrate who held the identification parade, a witness who testified against Gopi Nath Saha, the judge and the standing counsel who prosecuted the case. The letters threatened to dispatch forthwith all those who dared, whether actively or passively, to obstruct the writer's comrades or helped the government by giving evidence. The letterheads used the image of Kali: that elevating work of art, which no doubt, appealed to the lovers of symbolism – the dark-skinned goddess with flowing dark hair, holding aloft a bloody knife with one of her four hands; another dangling a severed human head suspended by the hair; a garland of eight severed heads and a couple of forearms slung around the front of her body and the malicious delight on her face which sent her scarlet tongue protruding and curling down over her chin as she trampled a chalk-white, fair-haired male corpse.³

Mike had arrived. He came to see her every day on his way to work. But this was not the time to burden him with her worries. She would wait until it was

time for the evening visit. She replied bravely to all his queries, her voice barely audible, for the surgery had sapped all her strength. He gazed at her thoughtfully before leaving.

Gopi Nath Saha had stated in court that it was the police commissioner that he had been after: In the beginning of last year I read in the newspapers that a European gentleman of the name of Mr Tegart, after going all over the world and collecting information regarding freedom for India, was returning to India with a view to obstruct our endeavours. I began meditating very much on this question of obstruction to our freedom. While thus contemplating over it, I would feel my head get heated. I could not sleep or eat. In this state I heard the call of the Mother: follow him; remove him from this world. I first saw him on the day of the distribution of the King's Police Medal; I saw him many times at the flower stalls of New Market and I passed close by him many a time. I followed him when he left his house, with firearms in my possession, to many places. I even opened the safety catch of my revolver to be ready to shoot him while following him, but did not actually shoot him because I had not received the final call from my Mother. I began meditating deeply as to whether I would kill him or not. Two or three days before my arrest, I got back into my previous state. I felt my head heated. I had no sleep or appetite for food, could not stop inside my room. The day on which I was arrested, I came out in the morning. I went to the Maidan and walked absent-mindedly for a long distance. I saw a sahib and thought this was Mr Tegart. Then I shot him. I fired many shots at him. I do not remember how many I fired. My idea was: lest, by any chance he should survive. Before I fired and even when I fired, I did not have in my mind the idea whether I myself was going to live or not. When many people shouted out Robber, robber! Murder, murder! Catch him! Then I began to run ...⁴

The boy had fired point-blank at his pursuers, seriously wounding two of them; one of them being the driver of a car who had refused to drive him to safety. The man would have undoubtedly been killed had his belt not deflected the bullet. The boy had then leapt on to a tum-tum – a dogcart, but had been taken prisoner within seconds.

Gopi Nath had then gone on to say: I was taken to the room of the commissioner of police. Even then, my idea was that the commissioner of police was dead. When I saw him standing in front of me I was confounded. I thought, what have I done? He asked me, you have made a mistake, have you not. I said: how could such a thing have happened? I even now think that as regards the bullets which I

fired into the sahib who was killed, a sort of current has formed, by reason of which those bullet wounds have affected Mr Tegart's body. I believe in thought current ...⁵

I was taken to the Special Branch office. About eight o'clock that night Mr Tegart himself came. He again asked me, you have made a mistake, have you not? I said, yes, it was you whom I wanted to kill, but you have been saved by God's grace ... with regard to the innocent sahib whom I killed, I am extremely sorry. I do not consider anybody to be my enemy just because he is a sahib. I am extremely sorry for those persons who have been wounded. For the soul of this sahib I am praying to God.

An Indian assistant sub-inspector had however confirmed that there were others involved. He had been detailed to watch the movements of one Nripen who was known to be plotting the assassination of the commissioner. He had seen Nripen and the accused together before. A number of ringleaders were detained under Regulation III though three others absconded before their warrants could be obtained. The house of Jashoda Ranjan Pal, an ex-lance naik of the 49th Bengal Regiment, was raided and six well-made bombs, a quantity of picric acid and tools for making more bombs were discovered. The police also discovered that the unfortunate boy, Gopi Nath, had spent a number of weeks in that house the previous year.

Gopi Nath had hidden nothing but the names of his associates. His defence counsel put in a plea of insanity and had the original idea of calling the commissioner as witness for the defence. Mike had been distinctly tickled. The main witness, however, was Dr G.S. Bose, lecturer in abnormal psychology at Calcutta University. He claimed that it was obvious from Gopi Nath's statement and actions that he was insane and that his family history tended to confirm the same; one of his brothers was an idiot; an aunt had lost her reason; and several others could be considered quite mad. Perhaps he had protested too much, for the plea had not stuck. What had disgusted Kathleen was the painful verbal gymnastics performed by the writers of the nationalist papers who tried to appear to condemn the crime while eulogizing him as a young patriot at the same time.

Mike had come back. Little worry lines creased the skin around his eyes. 'You need to go back home,' he said. 'You will never recover your strength here. I have your sailing dates ready.'

Tears sprung to Kathleen's eyes. 'I can't go. I will not leave. I have been having these dreams. It is a premonition I tell you. I will not leave your side.'

He sat by the bedside murmuring words of comfort. He stroked her hair promising to take furlough in August. He would be by her side again before the end of two months and he would himself bring her back. At last, she was quiet.

'That Gopi Nath was a cocky little fellow, wasn't he?' he laughed. 'Do you remember the time when the tum-tum driver was being questioned and he was describing how the accused had leapt on to his cart at Wellesley Street⁶ and pointed a gun at him? Gopi Nath had called out from the dock: show him the revolver and he will be able to say.' It brought a faint smile to Kathleen's face. 'Then he had addressed the witness and said: If you had driven fast at my request then I would have been able to come back and shoot Mr Tegart. In future, if anyone of us asks you to do this work, please do not refuse him.'

The dream had brought back memories. The expression on Mike's face was inscrutable. 'I had gone to see him soon after he was taken into custody. The boy had been astounded. He knelt down, touched my feet and then raised his hands to his forehead saying: "I salute you. I am a deshbandhu for my country and you are a deshbandhu for yours."'

ANANDA PRASAD GUPTA

A black car sped down the Trunk Road towards the Border Police outpost which marked the end of British India and the start of French Chandannagar. Hours slid by, he slept and woke; intermittent flashes of white breaking the monotony of the black ribbon-like road that spun out endlessly beneath their wheels. Lights. Piercing. Voices swelled, drawing near. Scraps of conversation. The borders were under heavy patrolling and security had been beefed up. Everybody in the car carried a revolver; Ganesh-da carried two. In the car with the four of them was Basanta Kumar Bandhopadhyay, a resident of Gondolpara Chandannagar, a bearded and venerable gentleman who was to see them to their new destination. Bhupen-da had introduced him that very evening as they prepared to leave Kolkata for good. Kolkata had become very unsafe. Masses were being herded

into jails for having participated in the Ain Amany Aandolan. Flyers were floating around with horror stories: the political prisoners had been lathi-charged and fired upon as Chief Presidency Magistrate Roxburg and Jail Superintendent Som Dutt stood by and watched.

The car was stopped and the papers examined. Heavy torchlights flashed around the interiors and empty boot. There appeared to be no valid reason to stop the car from passing. Besides, it was Basanta-da who was really the passport. He guided the car through the narrow lanes and came to a stop.

‘We will have to walk now, for the car cannot go up to the house.’ Since there was no luggage to be carried, it was not a problem. The driver was instructed to take the car back to Kolkata. Basanta-da led the way through the little lanes until he came upon a two-storeyed house. What struck Ananda was not the colossal double-shuttered wooden door, but the generous amount of parking available and the cars that moved on the street in front. He made no comment, for he realized instantly why Basanta-da had chosen to let the taxi go two miles from the shelter.

The knock on the door followed a code and the shutters creaked open. Their new host welcomed them in and led the way upstairs. There were two rooms and a kitchenette that had been readied exclusively for them. The three rooms opened out on to a long verandah which looked down on the courtyard below. This rear portion of the house was surrounded by a wall nearly twenty feet high which ensured that the top floor was completely shielded from view. There were two more rooms to one side which were used by the landlord and his wife.

‘Though you do not have to worry about the cooking, the kitchenette has been provided to strengthen the landlord’s alibi that the rooms have been sublet and that you are in no way his guests. The landlord knows that under no circumstances can he employ the services of a maid or a manservant. However, Panchanon Babu, another of our associates, will help with the shopping.’ Basanta-da explained before taking leave.

By ten o’clock the landlord had popped his head around, asking them to come down to dinner. His wife, who had been until now busy inside the kitchen, came out to welcome them as they trooped down the stairs. She had laid out five reed mats and they sat on the floor together. A dim electric bulb glowed in one corner as they ate their dinner in silence. The only small talk was provided by the lady

of the house, 'I know the cooking has not been very good today ... you must be finding it difficult to eat.' It was the usual manner in which all hostesses spoke and required the standard comeback reassuring her that they had never eaten anything better.

The introductions were not made until the next day. Putu-di was a teacher in a local girls' school, the one in which Basanta-da held an influential position, and her husband Shri Shashadhar Acharya, a railway employee, had rented this house in Chandannagar to make it convenient for her to work. Ganesh-da introduced himself as Atul and Ananta-da as Suren. 'We are revolutionaries and arrest warrants have been issued against our names,' he said simply.

Ananta-da and Ganesh-da settled down to work out a plan but the mind kept going back to those who had taken part in the battle of Jalalabad. What had become of them? Half-heartedly, Ananda listened to the plans of kidnapping Chief Presidency Magistrate Roxburg, but it was apparent that without Master-da's help and without the involvement of a few dedicated youths it would never fructify.

In a few days it was Ananta-da's turn to fall ill. He made a bad patient. A high-grade fever with chills and rigours took hold of him and his reason. The temperature shot up to 104 degrees Fahrenheit accompanied by a terrible retching and vomiting. Bhupen-da arranged for medical help while Shashadhar-da and Ganesh-da struggled with wet muslin packs to help bring the fever down, and Putu-di tried desperately to feed him soups and juices. But Ananta-da was unable to accept help from anybody. Nobody, he insisted, barring his mother and sister, had ever been allowed to look after him. There was nothing he could keep down and it was a source of tremendous shame to have to throw up in someone's presence. Ananda and Makhon had been banished from the room.

Then came the news of a shootout at Kalarpol. Who were involved? Had it been carried out by their colleagues or was this Anushilan's handiwork? The paucity of details left everyone on edge. Still, with Bhupen-da's help, some copper, lead and gunpowder were procured. Soon a room upstairs had been converted into a small factory manufacturing cartridges for revolvers, percussion caps and bomb strikers.

'If you are above accepting help from any of us, why come live with us? Leave. Get out. Go stay on the footpath.'

The angry words sent Ganesh-da racing out of the little factory. Ananda and Makhon followed.

Putu-di stood at the door. She had just returned from school. Ananta-da stood swaying dangerously at the foot of the stairs, his vomit bowl full to brimming.

‘Was there nobody in the house who could have emptied the bowl for you?’

Putu-di had left express instructions that he was not to leave his bed, but one had to stand guard constantly, for Ananta-da would sneak out to use the toilet downstairs. Ganesh-da stepped up to him and firmly and calmly took the bowl from his hands. ‘Help Suren upstairs,’ he nodded towards Ananda. While Ananta-da was at his sheepish best in front of Putu-di, he was a raging bull when it came to the others. Stiffening up the moment the boys got a grip on his arms, he dragged himself up the stairs snorting with anger. Dr Narain Chandra Roy came in to see him and administered some injections and quinine tablets. It made him retch even more.

Bhupen-da came to the house one day. ‘If it is all right with you I would like to make the most of your presence here with us. I have some young boys who need to be taught the use of a revolver. None of them, however, will be aware of your real identities.’

Ganesh-da agreed immediately. ‘Makhon and Ananda would be more than happy to train your boys. The roof can be used. It is not visible from the road.’

The understudy revolutionaries arrived for their classes and were led up the stairs to the roof. Ananda thought he saw a shadow move as he passed by Ananta-da’s door. He paid no attention to it for the moment and was soon engrossed in a discussion on the various parts of the revolvers and pistols. Between him and Makhon they had devised a study schedule and a timetable. They were meeting boys their own age after a gap of nearly one-and-a-half months. The lessons progressed efficiently, for the two trainers had learnt well. Despite the June heat, the midday hours sped swiftly by and the students left before evening could set in.

It was on one such evening, as they sat drinking their tea, that Ananta-da called for attention. He was a little better now, though he rarely came out of his room. He spoke clearly and calmly. ‘I have to admit that I feel a tremendous sorrow. But the pain I feel is entirely my burden and none of you are expected to

understand it. I will not trouble you with it; instead I wish to merely make known my decision. I will turn myself in day after tomorrow. I wish to end my life on the hangman's noose.'

It was a bolt from the blue. Ananda stared open-mouthed, guilt flooding his being. The cup and saucer rattled uncomfortably in his hands. It was true they had been avoiding going to Ananta-da's room ever since he became sick. 'Na, na.' He tried to pacify him ignoring the shadowy figure, in his mind's eye, standing quietly just within the doorway to the terrace, watching the classes in progress. Ananta-da, na. He wished now he had run up to him and asked him to come and oversee the proceedings. But before he could explain his reasons, Ganesh-da's jeering laugh shattered the silence.

'So you want to surrender? And why?'

'Because I want to die.'

'So if it is death that you long for, why not die after you have killed someone worth your while? Go boldly; kill an important British officer; then turn your revolver upon yourself.'

'The only reason you would say something like this is because you have no clue as to where I am coming from.'

'Is that right? Well then.' Ganesh-da turned and walked away, his shoulders sagging in exhaustion.

The exchange had gone completely over his head. Makhon looked equally confused as tears rolled down his cheeks. He put his arms around Ananta-da.

'You mustn't, Ananta-da, you mustn't. Forgive us. We were not being thoughtful.' Panic was setting in now. What had happened to their Ananta-da, the one they so loved and trusted? Both boys were weeping openly, clinging to him as they had never done before.

He placed his hands upon their heads and sighed. 'All right then,' he said, 'you win.'

THREE

ANANDA PRASAD GUPTA

Ganesh-da flung down the newspaper that Shashadhar-da had brought in and raced upstairs. Makhon reached out for it and froze, his face a deathly pale. 'Ananta Lal Singh to surrender,' he read out slowly. Ganesh-da was already thundering down the stairs yelling for Putu-di.

'Did you see Suren leave?' He had never screamed at her before. 'Why? Why did you let him go? Why did you not stop him? Why couldn't you have called us?'

Putu-di had taken the paper out of Makhon and Ananda's hands and was staring at it in horror. So Suren, who had left her house that morning, was Ananta Lal Singh? Suddenly, it was all falling into place.

'Look Atul ...' she began and then faltered, realizing she was talking to Ganesh Ghosh. It had been rumoured for some time that four revolutionaries Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh, Jibon Ghoshal and Ananda Gupta had been shorn away from the main group and were in hiding. She sat down heavily. The Chattogram group had been entrusted to her care!

Two letters, both dated 25 June 1930, had been published:

Dear Sir,

I am Ananta Lal Singh and in my name the District Magistrate of Chittagong has declared rupees five thousand (Rs 5000/-) as a reward for my arrest.

I have posted one letter to Mr Lowman, I.G., and the copy of the letter is annexed herewith. I shall do everything accordingly as written in the letter.

Please publish the letter addressed to Mr Lowman within the 28th June, 1930 and oblige.

Thanking you in anticipation,

I am,

Yours sincerely,

Ananta Lal Singh

The second letter read:

Dear Mr Lowman,

I shall meet you on the 28th June 1930. It is sure that you will never miss the opportunity to arrest me then and there. Never think it please, that I am going to surrender. When does a person surrender? When he becomes quite helpless and finds no other means to protect him, then and only then he yields.

Am I helpless now? No certainly not. I have arms to protect me, ample money to spend in time of need, many a helper to help me and a good many shelters outside Bengal as well as outside India to abscond. Now I am absconding with my friends and we are quite safe. But still I am allowing my arrest and why? Do you think I am repentant for any of my actions? No, never, not a bit sorry. Then is it a mandate on me by any authority? No, it is my personal matter and absolutely private.

I am revolutionary,

Ananta Lal Singh

Ganesh-da flung down a letter. 'Bloody fool,' he cursed under his breath. 'I found this under his pillow ... suicide ... twice, twice before he has pulled this

stunt.’ He glared at Putu-di who once again attempted to explain herself.

‘Look Atul ...’ She stopped and shook her head. ‘He was bathed and ready and asked me for an early lunch. He left without saying anything ... after all,’ Putu-di was beginning to feel less guilty, ‘who am I to interfere in your matters? In any case, he did not leave before ten in the morning!’

Ganesh-da was at a loss for words.

Ananda and Makhon were pouring over the letter left behind by Ananta-da:

My dear brothers,

You had plenty of opportunity to know me thoroughly. I understand I am much too sensitive. I can’t help it.

I think I have got enough respect and love from you, my young brothers.

I have no complaint against anybody, as you know thoroughly well. My vanity is wounded. I think I am ignored and deprived of my due share! I have no claim. Simply I want to bid you farewell forever!

I could have committed suicide or could have fought a frontal battle to die. But I have a secret desire in me. I want to see and know the reaction of my fast and close friend, during my death. This is why I preferred the process not of a quick death but rather a prolonged one in horror and at the same time to have time and scope to read what position I actually occupied in your heart so long!

I am definite that prior intimation would simply create a condition embarrassing for you as well as for me. Therefore please excuse me that I could not inform you before-hand. I am leaving and leaving you forever!

I have no idea of the next world. With a heavy heart I am going to lose the present one. Good-bye!

Yours ever,

Ananta Singh

ANANTA LAL SINGH

It was the beginning of a strange day. The emotions that assailed him were not new. They were old unpleasant acquaintances that swarmed into his brain, buffeted at his heart and plunged him into cold dark depths. There were moments when an apparition appeared holding out the pallu of her sari ... begging. Begging? The heavy gold-worked bangles, the chink of anklets seemed oddly familiar. If he concentrated hard, the vision cleared. Ma raised a tear-stained face. This wouldn't do. He had taken a decision ... a slow lingering death was his heart's desire. He had asked Putu-di to shut the door behind him ... he would never give his comrades away or expose them to risk. Why then this uncontrollable desire to weep? Why were his eyes misting up?

Within an hour the local train had disgorged him at Howrah station, snapping his links with Chandannagar with a neat surgical stroke. The teeming platform jerked him back to his senses. He could not afford to be spotted by anyone now. He had to avoid an arrest until the moment when he would march into Inspector General Lowman's office on 13 Lord Sinha Street. Nipping into a taxi and driving straight down was out of the question, for the taxi driver would know that he had picked his passenger up in Howrah. It wouldn't take the police long to figure out that he had come in from Chandannagar and that the friends he had written about could be found there.

A taxi took him to College Street. Ananta bought himself a new dhuti and vest and looked for a second taxi. At the Municipal Market he bought himself an expensive checked shirt and a pair of armbands. 'I have an interview,' he explained to the store owner and used the trial room to change. A third taxi was employed and when the driver was distracted, the bundle of old clothes was thrown out of the window. Somewhere close to his destination, he paid off the man and after a few moments engaged another taxi.

At about 1.30 in the afternoon, he was standing in front of the Intelligence Office. This was a high-security area, for it was a prime target on every revolutionary's hit list. Men in white thronged the area and high walls enclosed the compound. The main door itself exuded raw power with its two massive

wooden panels that towered over the visitor. They opened inwards now and then to let official cars pass. Ananta knocked. A flap was removed and an eye appeared at the far end of the three-inch slit that had been carved through the thickness of the wood. Offering three business cards Ananta said, 'Lowman sahib aur Rai Bahadur Nalini Majumdar kay paas bhej dena.' The man stared at the name and hurriedly shut the flap without further comment.

A white-uniformed policeman sidled up. 'What business have you here? Where are you from? Whom do you want to meet?' Ananta looked away and said shortly, 'I have sent my card.'

Minutes later, they were joined by another watcher. They always worked in pairs, the second fellow meant to serve as the backup, the other half of the snoop act, to bear witness. He did not utter a word, for he had caught the import of what had been said: a card had been sent. He drew himself up and shot a look – a compound of suspicion of Ananta's motives, disbelief of whatever he was going to say before he had said it and a complete conviction that he was one of the more malevolent types that should not be at large. But at this point the door opened. Ananta took a step forward but faltered as the police guards brought their heels crashing to the ground and slapped their rifle butts in unison. Surely the salute could not be meant for him. Then could it be for the high-level delegation that was rushing out to arrest him? A car sped past. It had Inspector Bhujang Sarkar in the back seat. They knew each other well ... but of course the inspector would scarcely be looking out for him here right outside the headquarters. Two more watchers had added to the little crowd around him. Could they have been sent as a consequence of the cards reaching the offices? But it did not seem to be the case.

After some ten minutes of waiting, a smaller door carved into the main door, opened and let out a man who appeared to be a member of the clerical staff. With him was a powerfully built Hindustani bodyguard. He swallowed nervously and said, 'Achchha ... who has sent this slip? ... then please follow me,' and darted back to the safety of the interiors. Ananta stepped in and was seized instantly by two great hulking guards who latched on to each of his arms. These were specially trained commandoes. Two others patted and frisked his body for hidden weapons going over the motions again and again in disbelief. The four sipahis, followed by three others bearing rifles, with bayonets in place, set off with Ananta to wherever it was that this new intelligence inspector Kumar Babu was taking him to. He was leading them up and down the stairs with

several twists and turns through unused offices. To Ananta, who had visited this place before, it was clear that it was an attempt at confusing him. At one point Kumar Babu ordered another body search and then said, 'Yes ... yes ... see if it will save you this time around.' With all the manhandling, despite the fact that he had come mentally prepared, Ananta was regaining his normal ebullience.

'Excuse me!' he barked. 'Say that again.'

'No ... no,' soothed Kumar Babu, as he set off again.

Despite the number of times he went up and down, Ananta fathomed that Special Superintendent No. 3 Rai Bahadur Nalini Majumdar's office was on the second floor exactly where it had been when he had last paid him a visit. He remembered it as a large room with three doors and a gigantic table so positioned that it would serve as a perfect foil to any sudden attack. Everything was just as he remembered, thought Ananta, as he stood across the table with the two commandoes still hanging on to him. The rest of the entourage had parked themselves at the door. Kumar Babu was at Nalini Babu's elbow.

'How dare you come to Elysium Row?' Nalini Babu was glaring at him.

'Why? Should I be afraid?'

Nalini Babu fixed him with a freezing stare. 'Take a seat,' he said curtly.

The two commandoes relinquished their hold and took positions behind the chair. Nalini Babu looked towards the doors and said in Bengali, 'Well, you may all come.'¹ The multitudes that had massed there melted silently away leaving just the armed sipahis. He went back to his papers and appeared too busy to pay Ananta any attention. In a couple of minutes the deputy inspector general, Intelligence Bureau, West Bengal, Mr Colson came striding in – the picture of the virtuous British officer seething with righteous rage. He came directly to the point without the need for formal introductions.

'What made you commit this senseless act? Is the British government a repressive one? Haven't you enjoyed prosperity under the British rule in India? Haven't we done any good to India? What justification do you have?'

'Mr Colson, it seems to me you have completely forgotten our relationship as rulers and the ruled. We are wearing different glasses. Therefore, what is

regarded as crime by you is appreciated as patriotism by us.'

Mr Colson flung him a look of disgust and stormed out of the room. There were people milling around the door once again. A man came in and whispered in Nalini Babu's ear. 'All right,' he said, 'let him come in.'

A smart young British officer² came in and took the chair beside Ananta's. 'Ananta Singh? You are considered to be a very strong man!' He smiled eagerly and bobbed his head. 'The hero of the drama! What do you say, Rai Bahadur?'

'Quite so ... quite so. A most daring action.' Nalini Babu smiled indulgently.

'Had I been in your position, I think I would have played exactly the same role. Well then, tell us the story.' He leaned forward eagerly. 'How did you plan and launch the attack?'

It made Ananta smile. 'I am sorry,' he said, 'I quite appreciate your eagerness but I am not much of a storyteller. I regret I will not be able to satisfy your appetite.'

'Mr Singh,' the youth sounded amused. 'You cherish a misconception about the Intelligence Branch. I am not asking you in my official capacity. I am ... well, plain curious? Tell me about the thrills of action.'

'I can help you with one suggestion: the newspapers will give the authentic version ... and why don't you contact the district heads and officials of Chittagong? In fact you should pay Chittagong a visit.'

'I would rather hear it from you ... but let us change the topic. Tell me, why did you surrender?'

'You wanted me and here I am. My physical presence was what you desired and you will have to be satisfied with this much.'

Nalini Babu was in the meantime on the telephone. 'Yes, sir. Ananta Singh is here sitting in my office. Oh, yes. Yes, sir. No, no, he is all right ... Yes, sir.' He turned to Ananta and said, 'Mr Lowman is on his way.'

'And the credit all goes to you.' Ananta smirked. 'Mr Lowman did not get the chance to arrest me. But I hope,' he put on an anxious look, 'that my

surrendering will not deprive you of your share of the reward.'

A cloud passed over Nalini Babu's face, wiping out the friendly look he had been trying to cultivate. There was a flurry of activity outside. The burra sahib was on his way. Inside the room Nalini Babu's table was cleared and the files and papers put away. The stamping of heels and the slapping of rifle butts announced Mr Lowman's arrival. The English youth had left. Mr Lowman exchanged pleasantries with Nalini Babu and drew up a chair beside Ananta. 'Ananta Singh, I believe.'

This was their first meeting. Ananta held out his hand. 'Oh, yes. You are right. I am Singh.'

Without so much as a blink of an eye, Mr Lowman gripped him firmly by the hand. It was a vigorous handshake.

The inspector general leant forward and looked deep into his eyes. 'Ananta, you have killed so many men – your own countrymen ... all innocent, peaceful people,' he rebuked gently. 'The poor sentry! He has left behind orphaned children. It was not such a difficult task ... I could have snatched away his rifle without having to fire a single shot! No, no Ananta it was not the right thing to have done. You will have to repent ... there will be no peace of mind until you atone.'

It was the same thing being repeated over and over again ... they were all under the impression that he had turned himself in, hoping to become eligible for clemency. Ananta sighed and assumed a patient tone. 'Mr Lowman, excuse me please. I am quite clear in my conscience that I have committed no sin and Ananta Singh has therefore no need for any atonement. Rather, I consider it as something done by me out of a patriotic urge. So long as the British are ruling over India with hired Indian troops and policemen, our revolution will go on. So though the loss of lives was unfortunate, it was inevitable. The sole responsibility for the greatest sin lives not with the patriots but with the British rulers.'

The little speech did not have the desired effect. Mr Lowman did not burst out with the expected stop-you-bastard-you-son-of-a-bitch. Instead, he listened most attentively and by the end of it dropped his eyes as if in shame. He nodded ever so slightly and reached out to touch Ananta lightly on the arm and said, 'You

look pale. Are you in good health?’

‘I am not. For some time now I have been suffering from malignant malaria. I am taking quinine tablets daily.’

He looked alarmed. ‘Do you have a fever now?’ His fingers had already found their way to Ananta’s wrist feeling for the pulse.

‘No, not now but I apprehend a rise in my temperature any moment.’

Mr Lowman flashed a look at an officer standing behind him. ‘Make sure he gets his pills ... Oh! The dog is here. The commissioner is coming.’

A little dog had trotted into the room and stood enquiringly. Within seconds Sir Charles Augustus Tegart had walked in: rimless euclipped spectacles; a trace of a limp. He offered Mr Lowman a shadow of a smile and Nalini Babu a nod. Without a change in his stride he made his way across to behind Nalini Babu’s chair and exited by the door on the other side, taking in, all the while, Ananta from head to foot. Ananta remained seated and returned his gaze evenly ... they were old foes, he and Tegart.

Mr Lowman returned to the business at hand. ‘Ananta, would you like to meet your sister?’

‘I am sorry I don’t understand.’

‘Well, let’s say she is a guest of ours for the moment.’

The news was startling but Ananta chose not to make a comment. It was close to five o’clock and Mr Lowman got up to leave. ‘Look after him, Nalini Babu,’ he said, as he patted Ananta on the back.

‘Oh, the suspense!’ Several Bengali officers had joined Nalini Babu in his room. ‘It was a fine beginning, Ananta, you really had him there ... but you have deprived us of the climax.’ They sounded petulant. ‘Let us know if you start feeling unwell,’ Nalini Babu was sounding concerned. ‘Where are those tablets? Has the office boy not returned yet?’

The armed police had arrived. A sergeant took charge and busied himself with the handcuffs and rope that went around Ananta’s waist. Nalini Babu and his

fellow officers stood around looking apologetic. ‘We will be seeing you,’ they said kindly.

A police motorcade made its way down Park Street to the thana; a police car leading the way followed by a van with the prisoner and a second car bringing up the rear. The thana officer entered the van to make the formal arrest and read him his rights. The next stop was the Lalbazar lock-up. It was unusually quiet. Ananta was led through empty corridors, eerily devoid of Indian staff. Lalbazar was not new to him, for he had been here once six years ago.

The memories were vivid. March 1924: IB Sub-inspector Prafulla Roy and his men at his heels; the boats tied side by side at the Salkia Bandhaghat, awaiting customers for the day; Ananta himself jumping from boat to boat; the boatmen too frightened to help; Prafulla’s screams of pakro, pakro – get him, get him alternating with maro mut, maro mut – don’t hit him; the wheedling and the bargaining – it had been quite hilarious, starting at Rupees 1,000/- ... not good enough? Another five hundred then ... before artfully dodging out of Prafulla’s grasp and clambering out of the chhoi, where he had drawn him in for a spot of private negotiation; slipping through the hands of the waiting constables to jump on to the deck of another boat. Ananta had been living in hiding close to Boon Company’s brick kiln in Kolkata where he manufactured bomb strikers, along with Premananda, Ganesh and Jashoda. They had been getting ready for the future. That day, dressed in a khaki shirt and lungi, with a khaki coat slung over his shoulder, he had been at the bandhaghat ferry on his way to Boro Bazaar when the sound of running feet had sent him packing.

The offer had been upped to Rupees 3,000/- but Prafulla, despite being tickled pink, was not to be swayed. They were both Chittagonian lads and acquaintances since childhood. Reminding Prafulla of his patriotic duty to his country versus his loyalty to the British had not worked either, for arresting this notorious compatriot was a greater high. And for an upwardly mobile young officer, quite definitely a feather in his cap. He was so young then. The memory made him smile. He had genuinely believed the police would have to give up if he refused to identify himself. Moshai, you are making a mistake, had seemed to be as good a line as any. It had led to several interviews with garrulous Bengali police officers who exhorted him to be brave like Gopi Nath Saha who did not flinch from proudly owning up, a red-eyed hysterical Deputy Commissioner Kyd who danced a little jig to the tune of why-why-why and the cold silent treatment from Police Commissioner Charles Tegart – much like the one he had received earlier

that day. All that clever logic had proven worthless the moment his father, the same man who had disowned him only months ago, stood up in court to identify him. Anant Lal! Baba's voice had thundered, ripe with warning. Then he had sworn under his breath but loud enough for all to hear: Sooer-ka-baccha ... son-of a-pig! That the errant son was being reclaimed had everybody in the Fairy Hill courtroom tight-lipped with amusement.

Unlike the last time, there was no frisking or changing into prison clothes, not even the insistence upon sticking to one kurta, a single pair of underwear and two blankets, which were mandatory even for the occupants of the European cells. Ananta had been kept in one of them the last time and was familiar with the routine. Nothing was permitted inside the cell which could possibly be used to assault the guards with ... not even a jug of water and for a drink, one had to request the guard each time ... but the meals had been sumptuous. He had been stunned when a white sergeant had walked up, notepad in hand and said:

Dinner order please.

You mean I can order?

Yes.

Meat, eggs, cutlets, soup? You mean anything?

Yes, whatever you would like.

Grand dinners and breakfasts had followed. It had been a startling revelation: the kind of treatment meted out to political prisoners.

But this time another surprise was in store as he was marched up the stairs. The cell was a large room, as expected, but instead of the usual Spartan appearance, it had been decked out as a luxurious guest house. A comfortable bed, three chairs and an easy chair had been arranged, added to which was the presence of an IB official waiting to welcome Ananta.

This was not the old room though, the one that had housed Subhas Bose, Gopi Nath Saha and him in succession ... the one from which Gopi had marched to the gallows only a few days earlier.³ Gopi's last breath had lingered in some remote corner of that room and it had plunged Ananta into a depression so dark that his heart had cried out: Gopi, Gopi, be patient my friend, I am coming.

But this time he was not to be left alone with his thoughts. There was always someone by his side. Seven or eight officers took turns to sit with him through the next couple of days. Not even at night was he left unattended. They chattered pleasantly and were not the least bit put off by his silence. They all appeared to be drawn to the romance of youth revolution; each one enquiring after the well-being of his friends. 'Oh! Oh! We are keeping you up, aren't we? Please, please sleep off. We will be quiet.' But they never left him alone, going to the extent of calling for their meals inside the cell. Though he lay on the easy chair with his eyes shut, he could not catch a wink of sleep.

The morning brought two British officers – arrogant and insulting. They threatened and abused and ranted. By eight o'clock Nalini Babu arrived, followed almost immediately by Mr Lowman. He enquired after Ananta's health and comfort and then as he turned to leave said, 'Ananta, your sister will be here soon.'

She really did come. It wasn't an illusion. Indumati Singh materialized at the top of the stairs followed by two police guards and made her way across the long verandah towards Ananta's cell. He had only just surrendered. How did she know? How did she arrive so soon?

'You surrendered? Ananta Lal Singh preferred to give himself up instead of dying on a battlefield!' It was her all right. 'I would rather have been summoned to identify your body lying somewhere in Chowringhee.' Receiving no reply, she rephrased her question. 'Is there any particular reason that you surrendered?' There was still no reply. It then dawned on her that there were others present. 'Are you well?'

'I have malaria.'

'They caught up with us in Barisal within three days of our arrival and took us back to Chattogram. Baba has been released on bail but Nand Lal is in jail. I was on my way here ... for the case and they accosted me as I got off at Sealdah. They went through my bags and took down the address where I was to stay. This morning, Mr Lowman sent his men to fetch me but by then I had read the news.' She paused. 'Every newspaper is carrying the news: RINGLEADER OF CHITTAGONG INSURGENTS SURRENDERS TO INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE. IN BROAD DAYLIGHT ANANTA SINGH WALKS INTO THE POLICE HEADQUARTERS.' There was no mistaking the contempt on her face.

By sheer chance, his surrender had coincided with Didi's arrival. The police must have put two-and-two together. Didi left and the officer who had remained in attendance during the visit remarked that the burra sahib appeared to have a soft corner for him and that he should not waste the opportunity.

‘You think,’ Ananta retorted, ‘my asking will grant India her freedom?’

By ten o'clock it was time to visit Chief Presidency Magistrate Roxburg at his residence. The armed police arrived once again and Ananta found himself face-to-face with the man he had dreamt of holding hostage. They waited on the latter's verandah as the aadeshnama forms were filled – a necessity that needed to be concluded within twenty-four hours of arrest.

Another IB officer was waiting for him in his cell. He greeted him with all the familiarity of a close relative. The cell had been turned into a regular party venue with no dearth of food and snacks. Laughter and conversation flowed along with tea and coffee and a light-hearted attempt to draw Ananta in. Rarely would the conversation take a serious turn.

‘The moment I heard the news ... well, to me it was clear as daylight: you had come determined to kill Lowman and Tegart.’ The officer paused, tapping the tips of his fingers together, eyes partially closed, reclining comfortably in the easy chair. His eyebrow flickered up and down before he moved on to the second point. ‘Or could your presence ...’ there was a dramatic pause for contemplation, ‘be used to foretell an attack on Fort William? Even if these were not the motives ... I do not believe it has anything to do with personal matters. No, no, no,’ he hastened to add, ‘not for one moment do I expect to be let in on your secret.’

Another confided privately and with some irritation, ‘Why? You know there is no way that you can avoid the noose. Why the hell did you surrender?’ Then reflecting on the matter he said, ‘No matter what your differences were with your teammates, you know your youngsters will never give up on you. They will go to the extent of risking their own lives to break into jail to rescue you. Is scoring a point over your team members so important?’ He seemed disgusted. The import of his words did not fail to strike at Ananta's heart. He pretended to sleep, drawing the blanket over his head. The cruel words could not have been truer. The young lives should be dedicated to driving the work of the revolution forward not ...

Yet another officer begged to examine his hand.

‘Most certainly,’ Ananta extended his hand. Though he was a bit of a cynic he saw no point in depriving the poor man. He spent some time peering into the proffered palm and said almost meekly, ‘If you don’t mind, may I be honest with you?’ Then, settling down, happily proceeded to reel off his observations. ‘The heart line indicates that the kind of love you experience is inconsistent ... well, to the point of being treacherous.’ He repeated his words once again in Bengali and then peered into Ananta’s face for a response.

‘Go on,’ Ananta encouraged him. ‘Do not hesitate.’

‘Please don’t take offence but I have a strong conviction that the reason behind your surrender is a matter of the heart.’ He looked sympathetically at Ananta. ‘Girl trouble?’

‘If it is written, it must be the case. But tell me, since you are so good at this, why did you join the police service?’

The officer was not in the least bit put out. He returned his attentions to the palm, but did not speak for a long time. ‘Regardless of what you think of me, or my prophecies, mark my words. Your lifeline is long. No court in the world will be able to sentence you to death. Remember me when it is time.’

The three nights in Lalbazar were spent constantly in the company of these chattering men who were quick to pick up the thread of the last story the moment his eyelids fluttered open. ‘Oh, where was I? Yes, and so the sahibs sent a message by wireless from the steamer. They had all abandoned the city you see ... quite the biggest thing since 1857.’

The lack of sleep was making him irritable. He could not quite remember when he fell asleep but he awoke suddenly to realize that the sun was up and that he was alone. There was no one but the armed guard outside the door. What new strategy now, he wondered, when the sound of boots caught his attention. It came to a stop outside his door. The armed police had arrived: two British officers with armed soldiers. The time had come; he was going back to Chattogram.

3 JULY 1930

Sealdah station had been completely cordoned off; a first-class bogey had been attached to the engine and within moments, the Chittagong Mail had steamed out. The DSP was present with his armed men at the Gwaland station and led the way to the jetty. A first-class cabin was awaiting Ananta on the Gwaland–Chandpur steamer. The sunlight glinted off the surface of the sparkling Padma, making its way through the porthole. Ananta stood looking at the great river that had once denied him. Memories of the devilry that had been conjured on that last trip to Chattogram Jail came flooding back:

Dekhiye ji, he had said to the good natured havaladar accompanying him, *khaney-vaney ki mujhey koi parvah nahi ... Look I am not really bothered about my food. Mujhey bas do vakt snan kay liye meherbani karna ... Please just allow me to bathe twice a day. I cannot do without bathing twice a day for it leaves me with a splitting headache ... yehi mera arzi hai, meherbani karna ji.*

The havaladar had taken pity and relieved him of his handcuffs and the rope around his waist. The idea was to take a good look and formulate the plans for escape, for bathing took place at the rear end of the steamer. In the evening when they were nearing the Chandpur jetty, he would clamber on to the capstans and jump. The steamer would be in motion and would draw swiftly away from him while the current moved him downstream. That he may not have made it alive had not occurred to him. He had generously distributed his food amongst the sipahis and pretended to sleep. They would shoot, there was no doubting that, but chanting the mantra, *no-risk-no-gain*, he had calmed himself. Then, just as it turned dark, he had proceeded for the second bath. But sitting on the capstans, enjoying the evening breeze, had been two sailors.

This time round, the trip was proving to be far less agonizing. He had bathed, eaten his lunch and slept. By evening they were at Chandpur. The Chattogram ASP, Mr B.J. Shooter, had come on board with thirty-two armed policemen of the Eastern Frontier Rifles. But instead of disembarking to catch the Chittagong-bound train, he was led on to a launch tied alongside the steamer. It was most surprising but in a while the launch had come to rest alongside a canvas, covered flat in the middle of the river. They were to spend the night there. The rains had arrived late that year and it wasn't until the first week of July⁴ that they had

really set in bringing with them great clouds of vicious mosquitoes. The sipahis took turns at keeping watch but Mr Shooter stayed up all night flashing his torch, sending the beam skimming over the surface of the water and periodically over Ananta. The launch arrived early next morning and took them to a spot where the railway line ran along the riverbank. A train stood on the tracks. By two in the afternoon they had reached the Pahartali Junction, a station before the Chattogram Main Station. Waiting for him were Mr Johnson, Colonel Dallas Smith and Mr Farmer with two trucks of armed sipahis. Mr Johnson led the convoy through a most convoluted route to the jail. Jail superintendent Dr Srigyan Chatterji and Mr Wilkinson waited at the jail office. Jail super Gyan Babu, as Dr Chatterji was popularly known, remained silent until Mr Wilkinson departed.

The officer, who had accompanied Ananta all the way from Kolkata, handed over his handwritten letters confiscated from the newspaper offices.

‘Have you written these?’ Gyan Babu waved them in his face.

‘I have.’

But Gyan Babu had not finished.

‘I understand you have quarrelled with Mr Shooter and refused to eat. I will not tolerate any such indiscipline in my jail. The district magistrate has put you in Division II. Have a bath and eat but ...’

They had been walking towards the confinement area when cheers and slogans broke out. ‘Bande Mataram! Down with British imperialists! Long live revolution!’ The shouts echoed round the walls of the jail.

The elderly man charged off at once like a wounded bull. ‘This is tantamount to a jail mutiny. Stop it at once.’

The warder and the sipahis led Ananta to one of the solitary confinement blocks. He was in Division II with a criminal case pending against him. The rest of the boys who had not succeeded in evading the arrests would all be in Division I and would get to share a large room – the hajat-ghar – in a separate compound. He entered a dark corridor. Three doors stared him in the face. One was opened. He stepped on to a beaten-earth courtyard that lay enclosed within towering walls. But a reassuring patch of blue sky could be spotted high above. This was the

ante-cell. The door that had let him in clicked shut.

The warder was unlocking the heavily barred metal door at the far end of the courtyard. Ananta stepped into the cool darkness of his cell and the bars crashed shut.

The wooden door to the courtyard opened once again and jail super Gyan Babu came in, snorting with displeasure. 'Huh! Our Chittagong leader has come!' he mimicked, coming up to the bars. 'Subodh Roy, Subodh Biswas and Sukhendu Dastidar! I will have to make a report.'

Ananta nodded sympathetically. Gyan Babu was caught in between: there was not one boy that had not been a patient of his at one time or the other, or a single one whose family he did not know intimately; yet according to the rules of the jail they deserved a sound beating with lathis. He would have to give an explanation as to why he failed to chastise the mutineers. Indian officers were, as it is, viewed with suspicion and the British never failed to take exception.

'So? Is it all right?'

Ananta looked around the cell appreciatively. Where he had expected a mattress on the floor and two wicker baskets of sand, there was now a well-laid-out bed with a mosquito net and a water closet. A surahi filled with cool drinking water stood in a corner and a drinking glass had also been made available. The only thing missing was a light source – it meant there would be no reading at night. 'You will be allowed in the ante-cell for a bath but then you will have to be locked up again.' After Gyan Babu had gone, the wooden door let in an ordinary-grade convict who set a bucket of water down and left. The sipahi entered, locking the door behind him and let Ananta out of the cell. He would lock the wooden door and wait in the corridor until the bath was over. It was to be the few precious minutes under the open sky before he was put behind the bars again. The lunch bell sounded and soon another convict came in and pushed a tray through the bars – a plate of rice and two bowls of fairly satisfactory vegetable curries. Dinner, he knew from experience, would be much the same and would have to be completed by sunset which would be announced by the bell. A muster and two bells would follow, sounding the end of the day. The night was comfortable and he slept soundly, for he had barely slept since the day he had surrendered.

Chattogram Jail had changed over the years in terms of security arrangements but the basic structure had remained the same: six blocks, one after the other; three cells in each block. The wooden door that led the way out of the ante-cell was two inches thick; the high-walled corridor outside, six feet wide and blocked off from that of the adjoining block by a wooden partition with two tiny holes. His first visit, he was then still learning the ropes, had been a noisy one. After banging on the walls and screaming: Surjya Sen, Ambika Babu, I am here, he had settled down to belting out Master-da's favourite songs one after the other. They were there, he had known it. They had been picked up unconscious after the Nagarkhana Hill battle, when they tried to commit suicide with spurious cyanide.

A petulant sipahi had kept calling out to him: Babu, kyun chillata? Chillaney kay liye mana hai.

Kiska mana? He had yelled back. Who has forbidden it? I insist on singing.

In a while, the SDO had come, looked him over and then the bathwater had been provided. But before the door of the ante-cell could be shut, Ananta had caught sight of Master-da and Ambika-da walking down the corridor.

So, Ananta, we meet again? Master-da had called out.

What can I say, Master-da, he had replied, bowing until his forehead touched his folded hands. You are after all Neelkantha.⁵

It had set Master-da and Ambika-da giggling. Naughty, naughty, they had said, as they disappeared down the corridor. But their parting advice had been: Be on your best behaviour whenever in jail.

Ananta woke up early the next morning – the ordinary convicts would not have finished their breakfast yet. Suddenly, the big bell sounded. Someone important had entered the premises. He heard the senior jamadar call out 'Sarkar Salaam' followed by an 'Aijbor'. Aijbor – that mysterious command had been deciphered during his first visit to jail: 'As before' mangled by the Bengali tongue. They appeared to be standing outside his cell. Ananta prepared himself for a visit. Right enough, an ordinary-grade convict came in and placed a chair in the ante-cell. SDO Mr S.N. Rai entered, accompanied by the jail staff, but behind them, leaning on Dr Chatterji's arm was Ananta's mother, her eyes fearful and far from dry.

The officers stepped aside to let Ma speak with him. Her husband out on bail; both sons in jail ... she seemed to have aged within these few months. 'What have you done?' She said sadly. 'Do you not know what will happen to you? How could you surrender?'

What could he say? What answer did he have? He reached out through the bars to touch her feet. 'Tell Baba I send him my pronam.'

Ma caressed his face and blessed him as she had always done: 'May you live long.'

Dr Chatterji reached out to steady her. 'Come,' he said gently as he led her out. He was back in less than ten minutes and in an unusually belligerent mood. Keeping his voice deliberately and dangerously low he hissed at Ananta. 'Are you happy now? Look at the anguish you have caused her. What answer shall I give her? Tell me? What is the answer? Why have you surrendered?'

The shock of this sudden attack cleared it up for him in flash. So the police were desperate to know his reasons for surrender. Even Dr Chatterji had succumbed. Ananta burst out laughing. That was the reason behind Mr Lowman's kindness and the visit that he had arranged with Didi ... the various officers that visited him at Lalbazar. It was the old British Mutt and Jeff technique! How had he failed to recognize it? The laughter unsettled the good doctor and he left looking very offended – he had seen Ananta through every stage of his childhood and youth. Insolence, sheer insolence!

FOUR

ANANTA LAL SINGH

There were not many visitors, for few were allowed to speak with him. The convicts that brought in the bathwater and pushed in the lunch and dinner trays did so in utter silence, as did the sipahis who remained on guard outside his cell. A subdued Gyan Babu visited on and off, usually accompanying Mr Johnson or the jailor Mr Jones on their rounds.

His morning bath over, Ananta sat down to meditate. He had little interest in food these days and often sent back the trays untouched. It worried Gyan Babu no end. Word had got through to Ma for, though she rarely visited, she made sure that a set of fresh clothes made their way across daily. Frequently, she slipped in a little tiffin box of homecooked food; sometimes a bar of soap or a box of talcum powder. An assistant sub-inspector of the Intelligence Branch had been specially detailed to examine every item personally before handing them over, for who could forget Kanailal's story? They had all grown up with it: a revolver had been smuggled into jail hidden in the yellow pulp of a ripe odoriferous jackfruit. Kanailal had then dispatched the approver Narendra Nath Gossain to the other world.

The sound of the barred door being opened distracted Ananta. The SDO, Mr S.N. Rai, had walked into the cell. The sipahi locked the door once again and waited in the ante-cell.

‘Ananta, are you well?’

‘I am, thank you.’

‘You barely touch your food these days.’

‘It's not the food ... I could not have wished for anything more. It's just that I can no longer summon the appetite I enjoyed earlier. And no, it is not a sickness

of the body as Gyan Babu will tell you.'

'But if you do not eat your body will waste away.'

Ananta smiled reassuringly. 'My life's work has been done. I have upheld my end of the bargain ... it is up to the rest now as to whether our dreams will materialize. I, for one, am done with this material world ... You know what is coming, Mr Rai. I must now prepare my mind for the end.'

'Your boys still look up to you. They are concerned about you.'

'Take my message to them please. We have finished our share of work and must cleanse ourselves now of every negative thought. No ill will; no grudges must we bear against anybody. We, that is, us as the ruled and the British as the rulers, have all played roles allotted to us in life. Our time on the stage is up. We must make a graceful exit keeping in mind the greater scheme of life. Just as there are no bonds to tie us indefinitely with our friends and loved ones, there are none that bind us to those who played the roles of our enemies.'

He had shut his eyes. The interview was over. The metal door clanged shut; snatches of a whispered conversation came to his ears: The babu really did spend all his waking hours in prayer ... these disciples of Shri Aurobindo! The conviction with which they led their lives, and the detachment ...

LOKENATH BAL, 12 JULY

Kumira railway station lay ten miles to the west of the Chattogram Main railway station. A Muslim zamindar disembarked. His servant followed, bent almost double under the weight of a large steel trunk. The two men went walking down the Grand Trunk Road, turned towards the fields and disappeared into the low range of the Kumira Hills. They emerged once again at the Sita Kund railway station, which was barely two stops away from the point where their journey had started. The zamindar, a flamboyant and attractive man, sent his manservant to buy two tickets to Kumilla. He stood watching the luggage while Haralal scurried up to the ticket counter. It was a nuisance. Since that business at Feni,

stations seethed with policemen ... a perfect nuisance for the ordinary man.

The zamindar adjusted his lungi and settled himself on his berth. Haralal busied himself in opening the tiffin boxes and arraying them before his master. The zamindar put away his newspaper and held out his hands for his manservant to rinse. He proceeded with his dinner and once it was all cleared away, lay down to rest. Haralal abandoned his berth to sit on the floor by his master's side and kneaded and pulled at the flesh of the legs, easing the tensions of the day away. At last when the soft snores announced that his ministrations had been effective, he withdrew to his own berth and helped himself to the remnants of the meal.

A little before 4 a.m. he shook his master gently. The train had slowed down and was entering Kumilla. The station was thronged as usual by white-clothed policemen and the ones in red pugrees. The zamindar and his servant hurried, pushing past the crowds.

'Wait here please.' Haralal left the zamindar and ran to the ticket checker, holding out the tickets. The zamindar's face contorted with impatience as the masses surged past him. He helped lift the trunk on Haralal's head and as he turned to make his way through the gate, he caught Police Inspector Kishori Babu's eye. The man was staring at him, the light of recognition unmistakable. Then very slowly, as if unable to tear his eyes away, he willed himself to turn his head. Police Inspector Kishori Babu looked the other way as the two passengers hurried through the gates and walked rapidly away without a single backward glance.

Haralal knew the ins and outs of Kumilla, being a student in the college here. Though a Jugantar Party member, he had good contacts amongst the Anushilan Party and held Amulya Mukherji in great esteem.

'My privilege entirely,' Amulya-da felt honour-bound. 'I will make arrangements to get you to Kolkata and send word to Bhupen-da.'

In a couple of days, a light suitcase and umbrella in hand, Lokenath boarded the first-class compartment reserved for Europeans alone, his thoughts already with the lads in Chandannagar.

ANANTA LAL SINGH

The ASI had come in to hand over the set of clothes sent from home. He paused as if he had something to say but then changed his mind and left. He was really no more than a young lad, no different from the ones that had sworn their lives away, dedicating themselves to their land.

The preparations for the trial were on. News filtered in: a special gazette had announced the selection of a special tribunal with a president and two commissioners. It meant there would be no jury involved; no prior information as to the witnesses being presented, or the evidence that was to be put up against them. The jail began to bustle with activity.

The senior officials arrived all together one afternoon to inform him of the need for a test identification. They were most apologetic: Ananta would have to change into a different set of clothes and shift to another cell from where he could be displayed from behind locked bars. Those that had arrived, ready to identify him would have to be kept safe and out of reach. But this time the procedure had a slight variation. He was made to stand all by himself in a cell and there was no line-up by his side. Nor was it like the routine identification made in court which required the presence of an SDO or a magistrate and where witnesses were quizzed about the veracity of their statements. He had had prior experience during the Assam Bengal Railway Dacoity trial. Some witnesses had failed to recognize him while others had picked him out, from amongst the rest, in an instant.

Ananta had already received details of the test identification parade carried out for the rest of the boys the previous day. It had been someone from the team, they had guessed, for he had arrived dressed in a burkha covered from top to toe. Where was the need, he wondered, for all this drama? They could have easily done without test identifications – but he figured they required it for the sake of maintaining the farce.

It wasn't anyone draped in a burkha. It was the Feni railway station staff that walked in: Inspector Abdul Mohammad Fazal Wasid, followed by Haran's mama, Sub-inspector Jatindra Mohan Rai and the constable who had been wounded in the shootout; Assistant Station Master Pulin Bihari Majumdar

accompanied by the two ticket collectors and the signaller; the havaldar and the two sipahis who had escorted Ganesh to the tracks – a fair mix of Hindus and Muslims. Ananta greeted them with folded hands. They seemed unimpressed and walked on ahead.

‘No,’ he could hear them say. ‘Not him.’

‘No, no,’ the inspector was firm. ‘I never forget a face.’

The spiritual prowess of his fellow countrymen, the powerful pull of ancient Hindu thought and the knowledge that he stood in the presence of a soul well on its path to enlightenment drew Mr S.N. Rai to Ananta’s cell every day.

‘Your disciple,’ he said one day, ‘has asked me to give you a message: He will salute when you enter the courtroom on Thursday.’

That night, after the jail had been locked up and the officers had gone home, Ananta sat down to chant, as he had done since the last couple of nights, the baani – the sacred composition – of Ananta Lal Singh. In a loud, clear voice he sang to nobody in particular ... perhaps it was God that he sought – introducing himself and his ideals in life, exhorting those who could hear to cleanse themselves and from this moment onwards dedicate themselves to helping fellow human beings and keeping them from harm.

‘Babu-ji,’ the sipahi outside his door spoke softly. ‘They moved him earlier today.’

Ananta was satisfied. He had learnt that a confessor had been housed a cell away from him and though the name had not rung a bell, he had been reasonably confident of the power he exercised over the minds and hearts of the youth. But his main concern was for the safety of the young ASI who was in charge of checking the personal articles that arrived from home for the political prisoners.

The first day of trial had been slated for 24 July 1930. Bits of news had filtered in. There had been much debate as to whether the case would be heard in the courthouse at Fairy Hill or within the precincts of the jail itself. Didi was in Kolkata trying to enlist Sarat Chandra Bose’s¹ aid even though everybody knew that he had abandoned practice to join in Gandhi-ji’s ahimsa movement. The Statesman had announced it to the world: The Calcutta High Court is going to be deprived for three months of the silvery tongue of Mr Sarat Chandra Bose, a

member and doyen of the English Bar.

To agree to appear on behalf of the revolutionaries would be an out and out show of support for armed resistance. Parents and guardians were digging deep into their savings to hire the best lawyers possible while Didi being everybody's didi found it impossible to sit still. In her own firebrand kind of way, she had marched into Lalbazar and announced that she was organizing the best possible defence. Ananta kept himself far from all the discussions. He had received the news with equanimity, for he had already made known his wishes. No lawyer was to represent him. He would fight his own case.

As he sat in the lotus position, eyes closed, focussing on the primordial sound, he became aware of a presence within his cell. The young ASI was laying down a set of fresh clothes.

‘Did he read the letter?’ Ananta did not stir from his position.

‘He did.’

‘Have you destroyed it?’

‘I have.’

KUNDAPRABHA

It was close to sunset. Kunda and her mother sat by the edge of the khal, washing the vessels after dinner. They used the wet earth and a handful of grass to scrub each utensil before rinsing them. The mother rose to her feet. Balancing a pot of water on her hip she began to walk away.

The young man who squatted a little way downstream smiled impudently. Kunda suppressed a giggle and busied herself, piling the vessels one on top of the other. This stripling of a fellow had been hanging around for a couple of days now. He was dressed not in the usual lungi but in a pair of worn-out pants.

‘Come away.’ Her mother called. She had moved a few paces away but kept an

eye on her nineteen-year-old.

‘Ma,’ he addressed Kunda in a low voice. ‘Will you be able make room for a person in your home?’ There was something quite fetching about the mischievous look on his face.

‘And what sort of a person would that be?’

‘You know the kind that the police fire at if they spot them and then try to hang them?’

‘Kunda!’ The mother’s voice was ripe with warning.

‘Ki, Ma? Not brave enough?’

The mocking laugh raised her hackles. Kunda turned to leave.

‘If you say yes, I will bring him along on Tuesday at eight. Wait by the bend in the road for my signal.’

Kunda walked briskly away. But Dulal had caught the barely perceptible nod of her head.

It poured all of Tuesday. The sky remained clouded and the lamps had been kept lit through the day. Kunda’s mother urged her family to finish their dinner quickly before the swarms of winged termites emerged from their holes. There would be no going to the khal that day. The vessels were left out in the courtyard where they would wash themselves in the downpour. The lamps were dimmed and the family turned in for the night as great cracks of thunder shook the little hut. Kunda lay quietly for a while and then, picking up one of the lamps, slipped out into the rain.

She stood nervously at the bend in the road, shielding the flame with her hand. The sound of raindrops pattering on an umbrella caught her attention. A shadow emerged from the undergrowth. It bowed slightly and she nodded vigorously. It turned to wave at someone and then walked rapidly towards her.

She led the way to the abandoned hut close to her home. She had cleaned it out earlier that day and had laid out a reed mat on the floor. Setting the lamp down, she turned up the flame. A small wiry figure stood before her. But in that instant,

she had been captured by the largest and the most lustrous of eyes. Certain that she was in the presence of one of the dadas, she bent low to touch his feet and felt the light touch of his hand on her head. Keeping her face lowered she hurried out and returned with a thala of rice and a pot of water.

‘And an empty ghara please.’ The man spoke for the first time. ‘Leave it in that corner and lock the door behind you. Don’t come here or open the door unless it is absolutely necessary.’

Kunda would wait until midnight each day, before she would take a thala of rice to the man in the hut and let him out for a while. Sometimes he went off for a couple of hours asking her to wait up for him. He was always back well before dawn and Kunda could catch some sleep until it was time for her mother to wake her.

ANANTA LAL SINGH, 24 JULY 1930

The jailor had sent word: Ananta was to be ready before ten. He waited patiently in his cell, for he had guessed that he would be amongst the last to be taken to court. The two jail vans would ply the quarter-mile route several times, carting the prisoners in small batches as precaution against a possible rescue attempt.

The armed police had come for him with a pair of handcuffs and a rope for the waist. The van appeared to be reserved solely for him. His eyes crinkled up against the sunshine. This was his first time outside in three weeks. The street had been cleared of all private vehicles. He was certain it would be the same during the return. Armed police standing ten steps apart, bayonets fitted on their rifles, lined both sides of the street keeping the mass of humanity that had congregated from surging forward. Newspaper boys did a brisk business – the Panchojanya was selling like hotcakes. The Chittagonians had turned out enmasse.

As he emerged from the van, someone in the crowd cheered, letting loose a cascade of emotions. Some joined in the cheering, some screamed out blessings on top of their lungs and others wept openly. Mothers stood with babes in their

arms; overawed children peered, darting between legs for a better view; old men braved the jostling and pushing. Ananta held up his handcuffed arms, clasping his hands together, acknowledging their good wishes with a namaste as the sergeant, inspector and sipahis who clustered tightly around him pushed him towards the building. Now and then a familiar face – a relative, an old schoolmate, a team member who had escaped arrest – escaped being named by the confessors.

The familiar surroundings of the courthouse had been turned into a fort. As Ananta was led upstairs to the first floor, a new awareness assailed him: the awareness that he was completely unprepared for what was in store. Could anybody just walk in to view the proceedings or would it be a small and private affair? The first impression, as he walked in through the doors, was that the hall had been turned into an amphitheatre packed to utmost capacity. His entrance was announced by a low murmur in the hitherto silent room. The handcuffs were taken off and the door to the dock was opened. Hands reached out to greet him. His friends, his team – they were all in, sitting on long school benches. The door slammed shut behind them ... they were all technically free men ... free until the day they were proven guilty. The railing came up to his neck. Had any of them wished, they could have cleared it in one bound. It had been over three months since he had last seen them: so much had happened; so much had changed since then. There was so much to be shared, so many questions to be answered. Ananta's eyes scanned the faces quickly. His closest friends were missing: Naresh and Bidhu – his right and left arms as he called them, the two Kalis, Tripura, Rajat, Debu, Mona, and little Tegra who with his untrained wild prancing had once floored his best boxer in the ring. How many were dead, he wondered? With a start he realized he was staring into his father's face. He was sitting in the dock alongside Debu and Ananta's father – Jogendramohan Meshomoshai and Rajat's father – Ranjan Meshomoshai.

The thump of a boot heel on a wooden floor and a ceremonial army-style salute seized the courtroom's attention. It had come from the dock directly opposite the witness box. There stood Lal Mohan Sen, Fakir Chandra Sen and little Anil Bandhu Das looking conspicuously alone. Ananta acknowledged the salute with a smile and a nod. A long table and three chairs on a raised platform awaited the tribunal members. A second table stood one level below with the two court clerks present at either end. Press reporters occupied the jury box and those that could not find a seat inside perched on the edge of the platform outside the railing. Beside the tribunal's seating area was the exhibition area where the

recovered firearms, bullets, empties, the wrecked telephone exchange switchboards and clock, its hands frozen at 9.50, had been showcased. The central part of the room had been transformed into the pit of the well. Here chairs and tables had been laid out for the lawyers and barristers and today some sixty of them were present. The public prosecutor Mr Abdul Sattar and his assistant Sukhendu Bikash sat at their tables, and representing the revolutionaries were Mr S.C. Mukherji, N.R. Dasgupta, Mr J.K. Ghoshal, Mr Kamini Dutt, Mr Akhil Dutt and Mr Rajani Biswas. The dock stood behind the lawyers' area, and the public gallery occupied the rest of the room ascending in graduated steps looking down at the proceedings. Every member of the audience had been issued a special pass, in spite of which the seats had been filled to overflowing. Some two or three hundred must have been present that day.

The tribunal members walked in and took their seats. The first request to be made was by Mr J.K. Ghoshal who asked that the three fathers be brought out of the dock and be permitted to sit along with the lawyers. It was granted. But before the formal proceedings could begin, there was a second request. Two of the confessors announced that they wished to retract their statements. 'It was given under duress and we lied,' they said simply.

The public prosecutor opened the case. He began to trace the history of terror in Bengal before embarking upon the various activities of the accused: the Paraikora dacoity was revisited, the AB Railway Dacoity and the Nagarkhana encounter rehashed. He proceeded in chronological order building up a strong case. It would be a week before he would move on to the actual examination of the witnesses. Mr Younie, it was common knowledge, was a hanging judge.² The occupants of the dock were left to their own devices so long as they 'kept it down'.

Ananta chose a seat as hidden from the general view as possible and motioned to Phonindra Nandi and Subodh Choudhury to join him. The boys sat on either side, as he put his arms around them. 'Tell me,' he whispered, 'had you boys discussed the plan with Master-da?'

It was an emotionally charged day for Ananta. Within him bubbled explanations as to why he had failed to be by their side in the days that followed the raid, during the full-scale battle when the spectre of death raised its head. But the details of the Kalarpol encounter still evaded him.

‘We could see that days were being wasted,’ said Subodh. ‘We had decided to target one of the two clubs – the Pahartali Club or the one at Ballantine Ghat near the Sadarghat Jetty. Master-da had approved.’

‘There was really ... no plan.’ Phonindra explained. ‘We would have to think on our feet, for the city was anyway crawling with armed police ... what plans could you make beforehand? If one did not work out we hoped that the other would.’

‘But neither worked. It was impossible ... there was too much of security. We had to wait the night out at some shelter to reconsider our position ... we decided to go to Rajat’s home.’

Ananta groaned and the boys nodded miserably. ‘Mashima told us about the raid while you were in the house. And the police have now recovered a torn piece of a dhoti with a dhobi mark from the barbed wire fence around Feni station. It has been identified as Rajat’s.’

That the police thought Rajat had been present during the Feni incident was amusing. Trying to find the connection between Feni and Kalarpol would have proved quite a challenge. The plausible theories being worked out in the police stations began to creep into his head.

‘We had taken all precautions, covered ourselves with chadors but I guess someone saw us.’

‘You would not have known ... it’s not the watchers but the city goons who are being rewarded for information. Anyway go on.’

‘Rajat was actually scared to go in. His little sisters and brothers saw us first. They were so excited ... Dada eshechhey, British der shongey juddho korey ... and he kept asking if Mashima and Meshomoshai were angry with him, angry that he had taken the family rifle. That Mrinalini ... she called him a great big silly and told us all to go in. Mashima was stunned at first and then had to keep reassuring him that both she and Meshomoshai weren’t in the least bit angry and were in fact extremely proud of him. Rajat went to meet his father while mashima went to get us a quick meal. We had gathered at the table and she had begun serving the rice when the children ran in crying “police police”. Meshomoshai said that the quickest way out was to run to Shahji’s Nouko Ghat and to cross the river. We touched their feet and ran out.’

So Rajat had left the last meal his mother had served him untouched. Could anything have been more painful for Binodini Mashima?

‘It was a nightmare from the word go ... we were on the other bank when we realized that the police were making their way across in a sampan. They were yelling, raising a ruckus. We were making our way through the villages but the villagers seemed to come at us from everywhere. They thought we were dacoits ... we yelled out to them telling them we were swadeshis, that we were one of them and we were out to fight the common enemy ... many let us through, even showed us the way out, but several continued to chase us pelting stones and shouting. There were some that were intent on rousing the masses even at that unearthly hour ... of course we know who they were ... they were the policemen who had set out to capture us. They did not want to face us so they kept driving the villagers forward. How could we shoot at them? How could we defend ourselves? The path was so narrow that we walked along in single file as rapidly as we could.’

‘So you did not shoot.’

‘Only when a great bloody oaf brought his sickle down on Debu’s shoulder.’ A spasm passed across Subodh’s face. ‘Mona was in front and Debu the last one in the line. Though they were abusing us, we had all walked past them unharmed, but Debu got caught. His right arm was nearly sliced off ... I think, from the way it was hanging. Debu turned and shot the man before running to us ... he was bleeding horribly but he did not collapse.’

‘You did not fire at the crowd?’

‘How could we? There were so many villagers. It was impossible to pick out the police.’

‘We realized we were destined to die and thought it best to try to get out somehow and make it back to the city and carry out at least a part of the plan. A sampan boatman was ready to take us for fifty rupees to the char near Freimukh but one of the villagers following behind called to him saying we had killed his brother. Had it been a boat with oars we could have taken off on our own but it was a sampan and the boatman was refusing to go. Not wasting time in arguments, we ran towards Anti Mahmud Ghat. The police began to fire suddenly and in the confusion we lost Phonindra.’

The angry villagers, Debu bleeding, the boatman's refusal ... the boys had not thought of placing a gun to his head? How difficult it was to wage a war against a foreign enemy while trying to spare one's own countrymen! The morning session had come to an end and the judges retired to the chambers for the tiffin break. The lawyers got up with much scraping of their chairs and the audience left for a cup of tea. Bhabatosh and Ashutosh's father, Bipin Bhattacharya, was at the foot of the dock with Jashoda Ghoshal, Jibon's father. 'Your boy, Amarendra Nandi, why did he not come to us for help?' Ananta had no answer.

Abdul Sovan, Sergeant Major Farrell's butler was in the stand testifying to the fact that his master was shot by Lokenath Bal. Lokenath was still absconding but, because the testimony could be put to use at a later date, the defence grilled Abdul Sovan for the details.

'He was light-skinned and big-built, in a khaki uniform ... he looked exactly like Captain Taitt. Sahib left his dinner and went out to investigate and was shot dead immediately. Then two of the gang entered, pointed their revolvers at me and told me to put my hands up. I flashed my torchlight in their faces and though they fired at me point-blank, they both missed and I ran out of the back door. I ran all the way to the Chittagong railway station and reported to the assistant stationmaster who refused to believe me until he realized his phone line had gone dead. Then he informed the sub-inspector in charge of the railway police and gave me a note for Major Baker, the traffic manager. But by the time Major Baker arrived, the armoury was on fire.'

Sovan had put on a lovely performance, at once servile and indignant, placating and belligerent: two shots fired at him pointblank and he lived to tell the tale! Pandemonium broke out in the dock: the AFI raid party swearing that Lokenath had never left the armoury premises, never ventured towards the quarters, Sovan could not possibly have seen him at such a distance in the dark. The courtroom buzzed with excitement as the defence lawyers looked for holes in his evidence.

Ananta raised his hand, silencing the boys. 'Your honour, I will ask only one question.'

He was provided with a chair and a small table within the dock. Ananta chose to stand up on the chair and planted a foot on the table. 'So you are sure that the man who killed your sahib looked like Captain Taitt and was a light-skinned, tall, powerfully built man ... and you would have most certainly noticed his big

black luxurious moustache?’ he enquired of Sovan.

‘Yes.’

Sovan had agreed a bit too hastily. Ananta turned to the president. ‘Yes, sir, I have the answer to my question. The witness has seen a big black moustache on the person who is said to have killed Sergeant Major Farrell.’³

This was turning out to be fun. His boys had enjoyed the interlude. Teasing tutored witnesses, picking on the president and in general looking forward to creating some calamity every other day would help them through what would otherwise prove to be a frightfully boring trial. Ananta could, personally, have spent hours watching the lawyers in action. Drama was lifeblood to him.

That dapper young N.R. Dasgupta, not more than three years into practice, had Police Superintendent Johnson sweating and fumbling through his papers, expressing his inability to answer: Don’t have the right papers at hand. Mr Younie had felt obliged to rescue the policeman: Well, how can Mr Johnson anticipate your questions in advance and come prepared with different files? That’s strange, Mr Dasgupta had been quick to retort. How can I anticipate in advance what the witness will depose in the examination-in-chief?

A product of the British education system, he had learnt their game well. But none could match the legendary Jatindra Mohan Sengupta: that voice, that style – standing sometimes with one foot resting on the chair, perched at times on the edge of his table, talking calmly as if nothing in the world could upset him and then lashing out suddenly in thundering tones. In his hands, judge and jury were mere children. But there was serious work to be accomplished. Surrounded by police were the three confessors. Though two had retracted their statements, they were not being permitted to leave that dock and join the rest, for their presence reduced the pressure on the third. The lone confessor needed to be isolated, needed to become the cynosure of every eye in the courtroom. Ananta chose to have a private word with the defence lawyers. Could they, during the tiffin break, go up to the confessors’ dock and discreetly, without attracting the notice of the police, tell the last lad that until he retracted his statement, the team and the people would not find it in their hearts to forgive him? They shook their heads. Influencing or intimidating a witness was out of the question. Another alternative would have to be sought. The two that had retracted their statements would now have to be pressed into service. The young ASI would have to carry

a message.

It was going to be an emotionally charged day. The public prosecutor took the floor. 'Exhibit II is a useful map of the area.' He introduced the case for the day and called his first witness.

DSP Khan Sahib Ahsanulla took the stand. 'On the night of 6 May, about 8.30 or 9 p.m., SI Abdul Azim and I were sitting in Kotwali police station along with several other police officers when we received certain information about some persons suspected of belonging to the raiders and hastened towards Shahji's Ghat on the Karnaphuli at the end of Firingee Bazaar.

'Abdul Azim went to Abdul Haq Dubhas's jetty where he found no suspects but got some information and saw a sampan putting out across the river from the jetty. He called but there was no reply. In the meantime I had found a sampan at Shahji's Ghat and with SI Hem Gupta, SI Fazlur Rehman, SI Pande Ali and two youths from Firingee Bazaar, one of whom was the informer, set out across the river in pursuit. Abdul Azim had some difficulty in securing a sampan but a little later he succeeded and accompanied by Inspector Heramba Ghose, SI Abdur Rahim, SI Yogendra Das and SI Rohini Bhowmik, followed my party across the river.'

'So we see that before the police could reach Ranjan Babu's house, the boys had left – a fact that the public prosecutor casually neglects to mention,' Ananta muttered darkly. It was noteworthy, considering the fact that the distance from Rajat's home to Kotwali was less than a quarter of a mile. The mood in the dock was an ugly one.

'When we had reached the middle of the river,' continued Ahsanulla, 'an electric torch was flashed upon us from the southern bank and we rowed towards it. When we were within 50 to 60 cubits from the bank we turned our torchlights on it and saw some six persons who immediately began to run towards the south-east. My companions raised their rifles to fire at them but I forbade them as I was not certain that these were the persons we were looking for.'

'Of course the milk of human kindness flows in the veins of this Ahsanulla who had not so long ago lathi-charged the peaceful Ashahjog Aandolan workers,' snapped back Ananta in a low voice. 'But this time he was aware that it wasn't the disciples of Gandhi-ji that he was up against.'

‘We then landed near a brickfield and waited there for ten or fifteen minutes to see if we could find anybody who could show us a way by which we could go round and intercept the fugitives.’ So now they needed a guide! Ahsanulla got the villagers out – the chowkidar, the dafadar, the village elders, the district and union board member and president. They were yelled at, offered rewards ... they would have to be the buffer to keep the police safe. A bit of rabble rousing and the policemen’s work was done.

‘... Some said that they had heard shouts to the west of their house and had gone out to see what the trouble was. As they stood, six persons came along, made an entry into the yard of their house, levelled their pistols at them and told the terrified Malekjamma and his father-in-law that they would not kill him if they showed them the way out of the bari. Abdul Latif showed them the path and they ran off eastwards towards the house of Ismat Ali Khalifa.’

The occupants of the dock bristled in anger. But then who can expect the truth from the government? Their boys had not intimidated anyone with pistols. The people were saying it only because they were afraid of the police. That particular family, in all probability, would have offered them refuge had there not been hysterical villagers chasing them.

‘... Suddenly we heard several shots being fired by the fugitives and on reaching the path leading to the house of Ismat Ali Khalifa we found Hussein Ali lying wounded and saw near the house of Ismat Ali Khalifa six persons running eastwards along the village path, pursued by a number of villagers shouting “dhoru, dhoru” ... catch them, catch them. The six fugitives had run past them and as Hussein Ali made after them, one of them turned and shot him.’

Not one reference to the sickle that Hussein Ali brought down upon Debu’s shoulder. But it had brought home the message that the youths would not hesitate to defend themselves. But why had the police not taken charge of the situation? There were, after all, nine armed officers accompanied by two guides against the six revolutionaries. Had the khan sahib been waiting for Colonel Dallas Smith to arrive with the Eastern Frontier Rifles? Funny, how the government maintained that they had sent only fifty-six to Jalalabad when they thought a hundred armed raiders were hiding there!

Khan Sahib Ahsanulla had finished deposing and Omra Mia, the president of the Union Board, took the stand. ‘That night,’ he said, ‘some forty or fifty of us had

assembled at Nur Hussain's house to settle a dispute ... Around 9 p.m. we heard the reports of guns ... I formed them into two parties and directed one party, among whom were Nur Hussain and Adu Mia, to go to the south while I led my party westwards with the intention of getting my gun. I met Rahim Ali, the vice-president of the Union Board who had come to my house with the same purpose of getting my gun. He had been on his way to attend a meeting when he heard the firing ...'

So there were several groups of excited villagers out that night looking for dacoits. It was so much easier for the police to follow the six youths at a distance and harangue the villagers with the help of the Union Board president and vice-president and whip up an emotional frenzy: get the dacoits; avenge the blood of Hussein Ali.

'... They each carried a pistol in hand. The villagers had asked them where they were going and whence they came. Some of them replied that in the town the sahibs had been killing Hindus and Mussalmans and that they had run away from town. They added – we are your people – we would go towards the east ...'

It was clear that the revolutionaries had explained who they were. However, there were some among the villagers who wanted to attack the youths. But it was sheer misfortune that two groups of villagers had assembled that night to sort out their personal differences.

'On the District Board Road we found a crowd of excited villagers and Kali Mia lying dead near Anti Mahmud Ghat. We were overtaken by SI Azim and SI Hem Gupta and the other police officers who hastened along the District Board Road that runs from Anti Mahmud Ghat to Potiya Thana. Khan Sahib Ahsanulla with his entire force had gone on board the police launch that had just arrived carrying Colonel Dallas Smith, Inspector McDonald and an armed force. The launch proceeded up the river and into the Shikal Baha Khal.'

'As we gave up the idea of taking the sampan and ran along the DBR we were fired upon from both sides.' Subodh explained.

'And I found myself alone.' Phonindra said.

'Rahim Ali and I did not give up.' Omra Mia continued. 'Rahim Ali sent Ali Mia and Abdul Ali in the direction in which the fugitives had gone. They went along the bank of the tank to the south of a house and there they found the fence

broken down. They went through the breach, south-eastwards towards a godha and as they approached, two men on the other side of the godha called out that they had seen a figure in the jungle. It had gone towards the houses of Torab Ali and Mansur Ali which stand beside the Shikal Baha Khal and had then disappeared. Though these houses were surrounded and the neighbourhood searched, no trace could be found of the fugitive.'

The tiffin break found Phonindra and Subodh at the centre of attention. The boys had crowded around them.

'It was about 1.30 at night. There was a mob at my heels and I ran into the yard of one of the huts. I had my revolver in my hand. The noise had drawn the owners out. They were an old couple who stared at me in terror. I was about to run out, when the man spoke. He said, "Bau, if you go that way they will get you." He asked me to follow him and I don't know why but I did. He took me to his barn and made me lie under a machaan heaped with straw. I lay there as quietly as I could with my finger on the trigger. I could hear the howling mob draw closer. My host was leading them into the barn. He threw the door open and said, "Aamader chokhey dhulo diye palalo kothaye. Achchha dekhbo palabi kothaye? Dhora ki porbi na?" My heart was pounding so loudly I thought I would die.'

'He gave you away?'

'No, he shut the door and went off and the people went off with him to search the next house.'

'We had become frantic, for we could see no sign of Phoni.' Subodh picked up the tale. 'We decided to make one more attempt to get back to the city. If we could make it across the wooden bridge at Kalarpol it would become easier but for that we would have to cross the police beat first. I decided to walk ahead, the others followed at a distance. We decided to pretend to be innocent passers-by. But a sentry on guard duty challenged me. I walked up to him never losing eye contact, for I did not want him take his rifle off his shoulder. But as I approached him, some others pounced on me from behind. I struggled desperately to free my right hand but try as I might I could not press the trigger. The revolver had jammed. There was no way I could escape.'

The court had assembled again and the public prosecutor had Kalarpol beat

constable Prasanna K. De in the witness stand.

‘At about 3 a.m. I stood on guard duty on the road outside the beat house. Five persons were coming along the road towards me from the bridge; one of them was a little ahead of the other two. As the first stranger approached, I called: Who are you? He said he was a passer-by. Halt, I said. Just then P.K. Barua came out of the house, and caught hold of him. As they struggled, Constable Lalit Mohan Choudhury also went forward and caught him from behind. The captive crouched down with Lalit still holding him while P.K. Barua stood in front, holding his hands. Just then the four others began to fire and Barua cried out that he had been shot and fell on top of the prisoner. I immediately opened fire on them and they retreated behind the tea shop on the south side of the road firing as they went. The firing continued until about 4.30 a.m. after which all was quiet.’

‘How many constables on duty at the beat house?’

‘Twenty-five, sir.’

‘Where were they?’

‘Gone out in search of the fugitives, sir.’

‘And they did not return when they heard the firing?’

‘The petrol in their taxi finished and they were waiting in the car for the driver to return with more petrol. Also the muskets they had been given were not in good working order.’

‘When did they come?’

‘In the morning, sir.’

Khan Sahib Ahsanulla took the stand again. ‘We had searched on both banks of the khal at Kulermath Pole and finally Azim and I decided to take shelter in an outhouse by the side of the khal. We heard the sound of gunshots coming from the direction of the Kalarpol beat house and we rushed there. There were shots coming at us and we had to take cover first behind the bank of a tank and then in a Mohammedan’s house. We then went in to examine the captive. A revolver had been seized.’

A 0.455 Webley was being displayed.

‘I could not open it because it was jammed with mud. Finally, Col Dallas Smith or someone else opened it. There were three 0.45 government cartridges, two live and one fired, inside.’

Torab Ali was called to the stand. ‘President Omra Mia and the other villagers searched our village but could not find the fugitives. At dawn, I heard that someone had been caught at Kalarpol. I went there and saw a Hindu youth under arrest at the beat house. When I came back I saw a number of people gathered outside my house. I could also see a man lying under the machaan of my brother Mansur Ali’s fuel shed. The man suddenly slipped out and began to run. I gave chase. The villagers joined me. We caught him on the narrow path between the two tanks. I wrested the revolver out of his hands.’

‘I had slipped into the pukur,’ Phonindra said miserably. ‘They all jumped on top of me. Ananta placed an arm around the boy’s shoulders. ‘You are one of my best athletes. It was the exhaustion that did you in.’

Khan Sahib Ahsanulla was back in the stand. ‘While I was writing the list, some of the constables and the Eastern Frontier Rifles Gurkhas went out in separate parties in search of the fugitives. Between 7 and 8 a.m. we got some information and I left with SI Abdur Rahim, Col Dallas Smith and some men of the Eastern Frontier Rifles. We ran towards Kilmirja about three quarters of a mile from Kalarpol on the west side of the khal. Meanwhile, on receipt of information another party consisting of DIG Mr Farmer, Inspector McDonald, Abdul Azim, SI Hem Gupta, eight men of the Eastern Frontier Rifles and four constables went south from the beat house to Uttar Dewan, a village about two miles from Kalarpol.’

‘Look at how they tailor the number to eight. Having practically brought in a contingent they will now say only eight men faced the four revolutionaries,’ laughed Ananta.

SI Hem Gupta took the stand. He had once been Rajat’s friend, his football buddy. ‘We met the Uttar Dewan Union Board president, Mr Abdus Sabur, who gave us more information. We crossed to the west side of the Shikal Baha Khal, went south for about a mile and a quarter accompanied by Abdus Sabur and some villagers to Fakirmirhat. A man called Ahmad Mia led us to Juldha, about

a quarter of a mile further and pointed to a tank. We could see four youths lying close together in the thick grass within a bamboo clump. We crept up on our chests as close as possible.

‘There was an exchange of fire. It lasted for three or four minutes after which the firing from the bamboo clumps ceased. Mr Farmer ordered me to address them over the megaphone. I did so. I said that there was an order for them to surrender and that they should lay down their arms. I told them that it was useless to fight, for to continue meant death. We were expecting them to come out one by one, their hands raised. But there was no movement or sound. Suddenly, we heard one of them shout, “Monoranjana does not know how to surrender. I want to be Joteen Mookerjee of Balasore!”’

The courtroom was spellbound. Not one eye could tear itself away from Hem Gupta.

‘I could hear them speak amongst themselves. I heard them say, “No, no, never.”’

‘I knew Rajat Sen’s voice. He said, “Mona, Debu is in agony. I am going to shoot him. Then you will shoot me. Got it? You will shoot me.”’

‘I heard a revolver go off twice. Then I heard Rajat say, “Shoot, Mona. Hurry. My arm is broken I won’t be able to do it myself.” I heard the muffled sound of the revolver twice and then a third shot a few seconds later.

‘Abdul Azim and I went forward. Rajat and Monoranjana, I knew them well, were lying dead. Deboprasad Gupta was alive; still gasping for breath. There was a fourth person also lying dead.

‘Azim and Mr Farmer were by Deboprasad’s side. Azim said to him, “Burra sahib ekhaney aachhen, tankey kichhu ki bolben?” ... The burra sahib is here, do you wish to tell him anything? Deboprasad was semi-delirious but he opened his eyes and said, “Burra sahib? Kay burra sahib? Lowman? Lowman? My arms are shattered; otherwise I would have shot him down.”’⁴

The photographs were produced and Jagadish Roy took the stand. He identified the fourth person as his brother Swadesh Roy. The room had become incredibly hot. Ananta could feel the eyes of everyone in the dock on him. The question was palpable: Ananta-da, why did you surrender?

Deputy Magistrate Dharendra Mohan Gupta was in the stand reading out the results of the civil surgeon's post mortem: 'Deboprasad Gupta, 19 years, son of Jogendramohan Gupta, had been found lying on a charpoy in the bamboo grove. Seven bullet wounds marked his body; the two wounds on the left pectoral region were associated with extensive scorching of the skin. There was a compound fracture of both bones of the right arm with three big lacerated wounds extending all the way down from the shoulder.

'Monoranjan Sen, 17 years, son of Rajan Sen of Bandel Road, had six bullet wounds of which an entry wound with scorching was present below the angle of the right jaw and an exit wound with everted, irregular, lacerated edges on the vault of the skull.

'Rajat Sen, 17 years, son of Ranjan Lal Sen, had five bullet wounds of which the two associated with extensive scorching of the skin were in the neck above the thyroid cartilage which resulted in blood oozing from the nose and mouth, and on the right chest an inch below the clavicle.

'Swadesh Roy, 18 years, had a total of five bullet wounds, of which one had passed through the left cheek smashing the upper and lower jaw to pieces and lacerating the angle on the right side of the mouth and a second one associated with extensive scorching on the lower part of the left chest close to the sternum. The wounds that were associated with the scorching had been self-inflicted. The skin and clothing had burnt away where the firearm had been fired close to the body.'

The packed courtroom remained silent even as the tribunal members got up to leave. Ananta was startled out of his reverie by Ranjan Meshomoshai.

'My son died an honourable death.' He tried to keep his voice steady. Ananta looked across to where Jogendramohan Meshomoshai still sat, hunched forward, frail and old, as if the cares of the world were no longer his to contend with. Mona's father, an elderly pleader of the court, sat all alone in the audience gallery.

'I had taken Rajat's mother to visit the site where they all died.' Ranjan Meshomoshai was speaking. 'We wanted a quiet little puja but the villagers all turned up. A very old Mussalman and his wife came forward. The boys had rushed into his yard a little before dawn. He did not hide them in his house, for

he feared his own family members would turn them in. He pointed out the bamboo grove on the banks of the pukur; gave them some leftover panta-bhaat, shoontki and a pot of water; promising to be back at night. The old man held my hand weeping, saying, “Bau-ji, I had promised them I would give them maangsho-bhaat that night ... they had called my wife ma ... but everything took place before our eyes. It was that hunger burning at the pit of their stomachs that had driven them into our home ... and all we had was panta. They were so young, bau-ji, still waiting to bloom. The soldiers came from both sides ... they had machine guns, bau-ji ... I cried out to them: don’t throw your lives away! But what could we do? We could only lift our hands and plead with Allah. Their faces float before my eyes even now ... why did they have to die?”

Ranjan Meshomoshai was holding on to the bars of the dock shaking with grief. ASPs Shooter and Lewis were at the door ready to cart them back. Ananta awaited his turn quietly. He had no words for Ranjan Meshomoshai or, for that matter, anybody. He wanted to be just by himself and was relieved when the grieving father was led away.

ASP Lewis had come for him. Ananta put out his hands. But Lewis made no move to handcuff him. Then he spoke slowly as if deliberating over every word. ‘My imagination fails to understand this sort of daredevilry. What were they made of? To them life was just a plaything. I wonder how they played havoc with their own lives! Had they been born in a free country their real worth would have been recognized.’”⁵

Ananta looked at the twenty-three-year-old Irishman. This man had supervised the machine gun deployment at Jalalabad and had been a part of the action at Kalarpol. But perhaps for the first time the two of them completely understood each other.

Gyan Babu had a piece of news. ‘Sarat Babu will be present in court to defend you.’

A thrill of pleasure ran down Ananta’s body. He would get to meet the famous Sarat Chandra Bose at last.

The excitement of having Sarat Babu in court seemed to have got through to everybody. The sergeant, who fitted his handcuffs at the jail gate, leaned conspiratorially and whispered into his ear. ‘Mr Sarat Bose is coming to defend

you today, Mr Singh.’ As he climbed into the jail van, ASP Shooter boomed, ‘Well, Mr Singh! There is good news for you. Mr Sarat Bose is coming to defend you today.’ Bobby Shooter was wearing a smile for the first time.

He scanned every face in the courtroom, there was not an inch of space available that day, but there was no Sarat Babu. A chair and table, however, awaited him. Ananta found it impossible to keep his eyes from straying towards the door. It seemed to be everybody’s predicament that day. A hush announced his arrival. The members of the tribunal walked in almost immediately.

‘I appear on behalf of Ananta Singh.’ Sarat Babu addressed the court. Mr Younie wore a look of faint surprise though he could not possibly have missed the announcement in the morning papers. But his eyes were bright and it was evident the president looked forward to a lively session.

DIB Inspector Sharada Bhattacharya was in the stand being cross-examined by Makhon’s father’s elder brother – Mr J.K. Ghoshal. When the tribunal retired to the chambers at tiffin time, Sarat Babu made his way across to the dock. Ananta stood up. Keeping his voice low, Sarat Babu asked after the mental state of the confessors. He had learnt from the parents that the one that had confessed before the SDO was yet to retract his statement. Confessions made to the SDO were admissible in court, whereas one made to the police had little validity.

‘I am still working on it. I am sure he will withdraw.’ Ananta whispered and then went on describing his failure at convincing the lawyers to speak with the lad. For the first time Ananta bared his heart. The parents had all been put off by his new-found forgiving attitude and had snapped back at him asking him to keep his arguments to himself for that one confession had led to many easily avoidable arrests. And citing the boy’s youth had served as little consolation for there were several that were younger and had not broken down.

‘Let me see.’ Sarat Babu murmured.

‘You? But it could get you into trouble.’

The idea struck him as funny and Sarat Babu walked away amused that Ananta thought it fit to look out for him. He marched up to the dock where the three confessors sat. Shooter followed him without attempting to stop him. Congratulating the three for their roles in the revolution, Sarat Babu made it known, in no uncertain terms, that he expected to see them withdraw their

statements.

The tiffin break over, Sarat Babu prepared to cross-examine Sharada Bhattacharya. The DIB inspector had begun to look miserable even before Sarat Babu got started. He framed his answers carefully in Bengali.

‘Answer in English please.’

‘My English is not that good.’

‘But it was good enough before the tiffin break?’

‘I don’t understand your English.’ Sharada Babu was close to tears. ‘Impulse – timpulse ... please ... you use such words!’

The occupants of the dock roared with laughter and slapped their thighs as the rest of the courtroom tried to hide their smiles. Mr Younie directed a glare at his courtroom. It seemed to be a day of distractions. Ananta caught Mr Younie looking frequently at the three confessors. They had seemed unusually fidgety all day. There seemed to be some petty pinching and pushing going on; sometimes the boys appeared engrossed in animated discussions. ASP Shooter had to go up repeatedly to restore order.

A sergeant went up and whispered to the judge and then led two of the boys out. It turned out to be an emotional and dramatic reunion within the dock with much embracing and cheering. The lone boy in the confessors’ dock looked more miserable than ever.

By the end of the day the last of the confessors had had enough. ‘Please, sir,’ he addressed Mr Younie. ‘Please put me in the dock with the others.’

The flash of irritation was quickly replaced by a carefully modulated laugh. ‘Oh! No, no, no.’ The courtroom had begun laughing but Lal Mohan Sen was not to be accorded the privilege, for his testimony was far too valuable.

FIVE

SIR CHARLES TEGART, 25 AUGUST 1930

A loud explosion took place to the left, on Sir Charles's side.

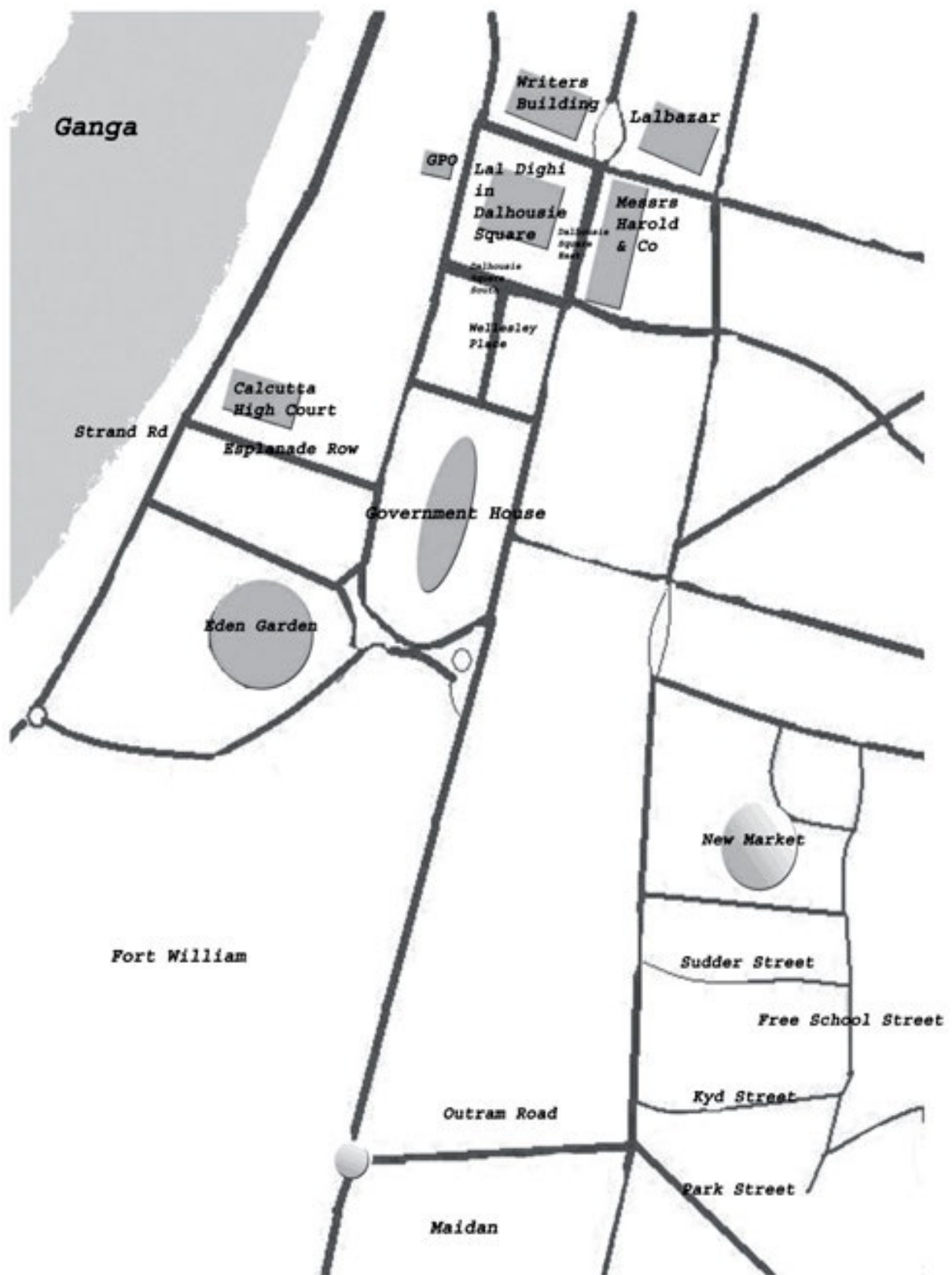
'Bomb,' he shouted and as he bent down to scoop his automatic off the floor, a second loud explosion took place on the other side of the car.

'Turn around. Turn the car!'

The road was unusually clear of traffic. The car, on its way to Lalbazar, had drawn up opposite Messrs Harold & Co. on the left hand side of Dalhousie Square East, about sixty feet from the tram lines when the blasts took place. As it did a sharp U-turn, Sir Charles dashed out after a group of people running towards the south-east corner of the Square. Dodging past the lamp posts he noticed a Bengali youth stagger and fall against the railings about sixty yards ahead of him. He lay on the pavement, bleeding profusely, unable to speak. Two mercantile marine officers had come running up from the south. 'That man threw the bomb.' They identified themselves as Mr Spears and Mr Hemmins and said they had seen three Bengalis waiting on the pavement looking southwards. They had both seen the now unconscious youth standing on the tramline stoop, draw back his arm as soon as the first explosion had taken place, and then the second explosion had followed. 'I saw one of the Bengalis run past me with a lighted cigar in his mouth,' added Mr Hemmins. 'A third clambered over the railing and disappeared into the garden within the Square.'

'Remove him to Lalbazar,' called Sir Charles to a sergeant who had come running. The unconscious youth was still alive. As the sergeant flagged down a taxi, Sir Charles returned to examine his own car. Two pieces of a bomb had struck the left rear door – his side of the car: of which one had penetrated the door and the inner leather lining. Subah Khan was pointing out the damage, with a very distressed Tim tucked under his arm, when Sir Charles noticed a burnt

blood-soaked patch on his jacket sleeve. Exclaiming in dismay, he tore at the fabric. The faithful driver submitted to the examination, protesting in vain. The bomb fragment had sliced through the skin and though the wound was not a serious one he had had a narrow escape, for the front of his pugree had been blown off. Greatly relieved, Sir Charles turned his attention back to the Fiat. There was a third splinter embedded in the tyre of the right rear wheel. But what riveted the eye lay between the eastern tram rails: a cavity and a pool of blood. It was the spot where the first bomb had struck. His gaze swung along the marks on the road. 'The second would have struck there. The first bomb appears,' he said slowly, 'to have fallen short, landing between the tramway lines and the other went over the car landing there! The splinters from the first one probably wounded the bomb throwers.'



Two private cars stood outside Messrs Harold's shop. They had been struck by pieces of the bomb. The plate-glass window of the shop had been splintered and there were marks of blood on the pavement outside the shop and further up towards the currency office. 'Three Indian passers-by have been injured,' he was informed by the crowd. 'Two coolies and a motor driver ... they have run away.'

'Trace them,' Sir Charles ordered a sergeant. 'Have them sent to the hospital.' People were picking up bits of shrapnel. As he bent down to retrieve a fragment, he was offered the lot. In all, there were thirteen pieces.

'I ummm ... was waiting for a tram ... I am Mr Carter ... of Bathgate Co. I saw the man, you just picked up ... didn't quite see him throw the bomb ... seemed to raise his arm and then there was the blast.'

Mr Garrons who had been standing in front of the Imperial Typewriter Company's office hurried up to them and confirmed he had seen the man as well, that is, seen him in the act of throwing.

Splinters had spread widely one of which had struck the plate-glass window in the office of Messrs Thomas Cook & Co. There were many who had heard the explosion and had actually seen something of the throwing of the bombs. Nodding his thanks and requesting the gentlemen to come forward as witnesses he made his way to office. It was already well past eleven.

Lalbazar had turned into a hive of activity. Jenkins, the filing clerk, had announced to every floor that an attempt had been made on Sir Charles Tegart's life in Dalhousie Square. 'The would-be-assassin,' he cried, 'tried to throw a bomb in the commissioner's open car but dropped it. Sir Tegart rose up and pistolled him! His guts were all over the road!'

Sir Charles's appearance brought back a semblance of order. McKinty followed him into the office. 'Dr Sheldon is on his way. May I offer you my congratulations, Sir Charles. This has been quite an escape.'

Congratulations. Yes, they would begin to pour in now. 'Where is the fellow I sent in?'

'Dead. But another has been caught and has been brought in. A Dinesh Chandra Majumdar¹ of Basirhat, 24 Parganas ... a second-year student of University

College residing at Ram Mohan Roy Road here in Calcutta. Sergeant Ford has brought him in from the Hare Street Thana.'

Mr F.D. Bartley brought Dr Sheldon, the chief inspector of explosives in, who shook his hand effusively, exclaiming over the miracle.

'The new man. Shall we ...' said Sir Charles.

A Bengali youth sat hunched over on a bench, bleeding freely from his right arm.

'He was nearly caught at the corner of Wellesley Place,'² said the sergeant in charge. 'He had jumped into a taxi but Constable Muneswar Singh managed to leap in front of it and Mr Jennings, a telegraphist ... a European, tried to pull him out. He threatened them both with his revolver, managed to struggle free and ran off down the road. Constable Sheikh Makbul who was on guard over Messrs Rodda & Co's gun shop in Wellesley Place saw him running towards Government Place North and attempted to arrest him but he swung around twice to point his revolver at him. The constable, however, did not give up and continued the chase, blowing his whistle all the while. It attracted the attention of traffic constable Muhammad Reza Khan who was on duty at the taxi stand in Government Place North. Majumdar, here, put the pistol at point-blank range to Reza Khan's head and pulled the trigger but the cartridge missed fire and the constable dashed forward and seized his revolver arm. Basandoo Singh seized his other arm and Makbul who had run up from behind, clasped him around the chest. Reza Khan took away the weapon which he handed over to me at the thana.'

The daring and the loyalty of his constables never ceased to impress Sir Charles. They were all unarmed, for other-ranks in the police were never armed unless they belonged to special corps of Armed Police.

Sergeant Ford began the formal search of the person of Dinesh Majumdar, while Mr Robertson took notes in the crime register. From the loose side pockets of the shirt, a live bomb was recovered. It was kept aside on a table for Dr Sheldon to examine later. The pockets also produced four spare cartridges that fitted the revolver he had been carrying, an unlit cigar, some five-rupee notes and a fully loaded six chambered .320 revolver at the waist.

'Belgian,' said Dr Sheldon looking at it briefly. 'There has been a misfire. Look at the imprint of the hammer on this cartridge,' he said pointing to one of the

chambers. He turned to the body of the deceased examining it personally. Two live bombs, similar to but smaller than the ones that had been exploded, were removed along with an unlit cigar and a loaded .455 revolver from the belt at the waist.

Sir Charles signed the crime sheet. Mr Bartley and Dr Sheldon added their signatures. The searches had been carried out in their presence.

Dinesh Majumdar had been removed to hospital and the report of his injuries lay on Sir Charles' table: two punctured wounds just above the right wrist and a third on the outside of the right arm. Two pieces of metal embedded in the right arm had shown up on X-ray examination. The medical examination of the deceased, said to be Anuja Sen of Khulna, a known terrorist in his district, showed ten punctured wounds, nine of which were on the left side of the body and the tenth on the right chest. Six of the wounds had blackened edges and from seven of them fragments of aluminium had been taken. Death, however, was due to haemorrhage into the left thigh from which a fragment of metal had been extracted.

Mr Mills and Mr Bartley had joined Sir Charles in his room. Dr Sheldon was ready with his report.

'Logically speaking,' Mr Mills was saying, 'the first bomb which exploded to the left of the car burst between the eastern tramlines making that small cavity. Ten yards north-west of that cavity, between it and the pavement is the pool of blood where Anuja had been seen standing. Fragments are embedded in the left rear door of your car. It is most likely he was wounded by the first bomb.'

'And we are dealing with a new generation of bombs,' Dr Sheldon interjected. 'Quite ingenious too ... gone are the days of cocoa tin affairs. These appear to be made of an aluminium alloy cut into serrated sections ... designed to fly off as bullets as the bombs explode. Each bomb has a detonator consisting of a glass U tube filled with the explosive ... we will have to wait and see what it turns out to be ... and tufts of guncotton at both ends. One end of the glass tube projects through the base of the shell and has a thread of nitrated cotton attached to the guncotton. The thread might be fired by touching it with the end of a lighted cigar. It will explode within a second.'

'And both were carrying cigars.' Sir Charles observed. 'In fact Dinesh had been

seen running away with a lighted one in his mouth. But no one has actually seen him throw the bomb.'

'If I may,' said Mr Bartley. 'You are driving north along Dalhousie Square East and have drawn up near Messrs Harold & Co. The Square with its fenced green area is to your left. Between the car and the Square are the tram track and the pavement. Let us position Anuja on the tram track towards the north. He is standing facing south. Dinesh stands, again on the tracks, some ten yards to the south from Anuja and faces north. As the car passes him, he throws his bomb aiming for the left rear, quite forgetting the danger it places Anuja in. Anuja is in the act of lighting his bomb when the first explosion takes place. He has to get rid of the one in his hands and he flings it as far from himself as possible. With the result it explodes five feet in the air above the middle of the roadway.'

'And the impetus carries the exploding fragments in the direction of the flight path so that it damages people, cars and windows on the opposite side of the road,' added Dr Sheldon. 'You,' he looked at Sir Charles, 'were saved because you bent down to pick up your pistol.'

'If you notice,' continued Mr Bartley, 'Anuja's injuries, that is, all except one, are on the left side and Dinesh's on the right.'

'And the second bomb, which Anuja threw, exploded within a second of the first bomb,' said Sir Charles. 'Anuja therefore could not have thrown them both. For if he had two bombs, one in each hand,' Sir Charles held his hands out, 'and a lighted cigar in his mouth and lit the two in rapid succession, he must nevertheless have thrown the first bomb before he lit the second. And the act of drawing his hand back, jerking it forward and bringing it back again to light the second bomb would occupy at least three seconds?'

'In which interval, a car travelling at twenty miles an hour would have travelled thirty yards! But the car had travelled no more than a few feet judging from the cavity in the tram tracks and the skid marks as the driver turned the car,' finished Mr Bartley.

'So in addition to prosecuting Dinesh of being guilty of conspiracy to murder which is the same as abetment of murder and injuring the driver and the others on the street, he should also be charged for murdering Anuja while trying to murder me. But there seems to be no eyewitness who actually saw Dinesh throw

a bomb, though it is extremely probable that he did, for he had only one bomb left in his pocket whereas Anuja had two. And he had a lighted cigar in his mouth. Moreover Anuja could hardly have carried all five bombs in his shirt pockets. As to the third person who escaped over the railings, we have no evidence that he was with the two of them ... he did not run with them ... may simply have been a terrified spectator. We will of course have the defence using their favourite ploy saying that the revolver and the bombs were planted on Dinesh to frame him,' said Sir Charles sarcastically. 'The boy is as it is claiming to be a spectator who got caught in the blast and is refusing all knowledge of the bomb and the revolver. He has not a clue how a bomb similar to the one Anuja was carrying and to the ones used on the scene, and the revolver of Belgian make, once again like the one Anuja had on him, came to be found on his person. I am certain those revolvers will turn out to be unlicensed ones.'

'There are witnesses who will testify that he had the revolver with him,' said Mr Mills. 'The telegraphist Mr Jennings, who tried to pull him out of the taxi at Wellesley Place, was threatened with the revolver. The incident was witnessed by a Mr Hodge, a solicitor of Orr Digman's and a Miss Kirwan, a clerk from that office and they both say it was a man with a bleeding right arm. And the hammer mark on the cartridge goes with Constable Reza Khan's story that the revolver misfired.'

He was at the doctor's office for the results of an X-ray he had had when the doctor, a colonel of the Indian Medical Service, said rather casually, 'I've wasted most of the afternoon today. I had a personal consultation and the doctor just did not turn up! I am told that he has been arrested!'

'Is that so?' said Sir Charles. 'Is it Dr Narain Chandra Roy that you had your appointment with?'

'It was.'

'Then from what I have heard of the man,' said Sir Charles, 'he has had his last consultation for some considerable time.'

Since the attack on him the previous day, his boys had not let the grass grow beneath their feet. They had arrested Dr Narain Roy that very evening. He is a clever medical man, thought Sir Charles as he left the colonel's office, one with a good consulting practice and thought much of by his European colleagues.

None of them have any idea that he was in any way connected with the revolutionists and even after his arrest are finding it difficult to believe it ... such a pleasant fellow, so hail-fellow-well-met, devoting all his time to his profession.

That evening a bomb was thrown at the police station in Jorbagan. Two young Bengalis had been seen on cycles. It was a poorly conceived plan and seemed to show a lack of nerve. The perpetrators aimed at the wrong part of the building and got several passers-by instead. No one was killed, though one suffered severe injuries. The bomb used was similar to the ones used on 25 August. On the morning of 27 August another bomb was thrown at the police outpost at Eden Gardens. The building formed three sides of a square: the north side being the police outpost, the south side the cook houses, the west side the living area for the PWD coolies and chaprassis who worked in the Garden. The bomb went over the cookhouse landing on the corner of the roof and dropped into the compound almost on top of a chaprassi. The poor man was terribly injured. Parts of his body had literally blown off and were found plastered to the roof and walls. Another chaprassi beside him was severely injured. A constable and a servant escaped with minor injuries. The bomb again was similar to the ones used at Dalhousie Square. It was clear to Sir Charles that his attempted assassination had meant to signal the start to a campaign.

But on 29 August, Lowman was gunned down. He had gone to Dacca and with Mr Eric Hodson, the superintendent of Dacca, was visiting Mr Burt, the superintendent of Narayangunj River Police, who had been admitted to the Mitford Hospital. They had been standing on the grounds of the hospital after their visit, talking to the civil surgeon when they were shot from behind: two bullets pumped into Mr Lowman and three into Mr Hodson. An Indian, the hospital contractor, tried to seize the young Bengali who had made the attack but the latter wrenched himself out of his grasp and escaped. Lowman and Hodson had been rushed in for emergency surgery. Colonel Harnett of the IMS was being flown from Calcutta to Dacca accompanied by five nurses.

In a couple of hours, news arrived. Doctor Satish Ghose³ had performed the surgeries without waiting for Colonel Harnett. Hodson was stable but Lowman was no more.

The great doors swung open smartly as the sentries jumped to fall in and salute the sleek black car that had arrived unexpectedly. The warning rang through the floors of the Lalbazar Headquarters alerting the night-duty staff. The police

commissioner was on his way up.

It was a little past midnight. Sir Charles seated himself at his desk without a word. The duty officer hovered anxiously. Within minutes Deputy Commissioner Bartley arrived followed by officers McKinty, Janvrin, Le Brocq, Waterworth, Finney, Johnstone, Spencer and Weale, all slightly out of breath, having made their way up, on the double, aware that the commissioner had beaten them to it. The duty officer excused himself. He was clearly not required. As he left, ten British sergeants came bounding up the stairs and lined up outside the commissioner's door.

Sir Charles waited until the door had been shut, before he addressed his chosen boys. 'We go into action half an hour from now. Each one of you will carry an electric torch and your revolvers. Be back in time. Remember to wear tennis shoes and bring scarves to cover your faces with.'

The team soon reassembled ready to follow Sir Charles without question. But questions hung heavy in the air. What kind of action was this going to be, for the armoury was being left untouched? No rifles, no ammunition? They could only wonder.

Six cars sped out by one o'clock and followed the commissioner's car. It was an all-British team consisting of twenty officers and sergeants. Even the drivers were British. A little before 3 a.m. they crossed the border of British India into the French territory of Chandernagore. The cars rolled to a stop and the commissioner stepped out. He unrolled a map⁴ – a layout of a double-storeyed house complete to the last detail. The house stood on the main road facing west. A high wall surrounded the compound behind the house, beyond which lay a pukur with a jungle on its eastern bank. Two narrow side lanes turned off from the main road and ran past the northern and southern sides of the house towards the jungle. Wicket gates in the compound wall opened out into the two side lanes.

Sir Charles jabbed his finger at the positions he wanted covered. 'Keywood, on the side lane in the north beneath the windows; Walters, side lane on the north, a little west of the wicket gate; Todd, side lane on the north, east of the wicket gate ...' Positions were allotted until the target was completely surrounded. Then getting into their cars they drove for half a mile more. The rest of the way to Gondolpara would be done on foot.

‘We expect to take on four armed revolutionaries,’ Sir Charles finally broke the news. ‘We will take them dead or we will take them alive ... whichever.’

All questions were answered in one go. Should there be a sympathizer even within this group, it was too late now for betrayal. He had taken no chances. No arms had been drawn from the armoury lest it served as a tip-off. He had not permitted even a whiff of an operation in the offing to reach the revolutionaries.

‘Once the encircling operation is over, I will inform the administrator of Chandernagore – Monsieur Champion.’

ANANDA PRASAD GUPTA, 1 SEPTEMBER 1930

Ananda was on the night watch with Lokenath-da. The three months in Chandannagar had gone off without incident. He looked at his watch. In a couple of hours it would be light. It was a day they were all looking forward to, for the first day of the month was payday at school. Putu-di, who doted on Makhon, had promised him a lunch of mutton curry and rice.

He paced up and down the verandah, looking out towards north. Gondolpara was a quiet place where anything hardly ever happened. The shadowy outlines of the trees and the homes they surrounded cast a warm feeling of comfort. The residents of Gondolpara slept peacefully. A cluster of shadows moved. It caught his eye and he wondered if his mind was playing tricks on him. There it was again: a short sharp burst of movement. He clutched at Loka-da’s arm.

‘Run.’ It had taken Loka-da no more than a fraction of a second to figure it out. These were armed police crouching on the ground, crawling towards them.

Grabbing his torch and revolver Ananda raced behind Loka-da down the stairs, calling out to Ganesh-da and Makhon. ‘You have to leave by the secret door at the back.’ Shashadhar-da came out of his room. ‘We, Putu and I, will remain here ... we don’t know anything.’

‘But they have the house surrounded.’

‘You have no choice.’

Ananda crept behind Ganesh-da out of the secret gate. He could feel Makhon’s hand on the small of his back. Keep going, it said, I am right behind you. Loka-da was at the very end of the line, keeping a sharp lookout. They were skirting the southern bank of the pukur, pressing their feet deep into the wet earth to avoid making squelching sounds. The predawn hour was still and silent when a whistle shrilled ripping through the night air. All at once sounds of whistles began to come from every direction. Powerful torchlights came on, blinding Ananda and the firing began from all sides. He tried to run, he tried to fire, he did fire but the bright white light completely blocked all vision. A massive blow caught him on the leg and as he keeled over, powerful arms closed in on him. He was being held down by several pairs of hands; pressed into the slush. He was choking. His breath came in gasps ... he was blacking out.

He came to spluttering: the mud sticky within his nose and mouth. A wave of pain shot up his leg and he lay still, his arms pinned beneath his chest, his nails scraping against cold hard bricks ... he was back in the compound of the house. Gingerly, he raised his head to get a fleeting glimpse of a white sergeant standing over him with his revolver drawn. A moan escaped him as the pain brought on a wave of nausea. By his side lay Ganesh-da, face down, absolutely still. There was firing ... agitated voices ... a heavy body crashed to the ground ... there were lights on in the house ... a sharp crack at the top of his head and his chin thudded against the floor. There had been a vague impression of woman in a sari being forced to the ground and white men swarming all over the place.

The shriek of a female voice jerked him back to the present. There was shouting ... too many voices ... swearing, abusing; there was hysteria all around.

‘Nothing. Nothing.’ He could hear Ganesh-da moan. Then loud enough for all to hear he yelled, ‘I have nothing to say, nothing, nothing.’

The mad ravings of English voices kept ringing in his ears: ‘Answer. Answer you must.’ Every word was interspersed with the dull thud of a blow.

‘You bastards,’ a cold voice was saying. ‘You have killed sixty-four of our people.’⁵

‘Teach him what is what.’ The same low voice gave the command.

Shoes, heels and batons rained down. Ganesh-da twisted, trying to curl his body, but his manacled limbs had been stretched tight on the floor.

So this was what being a political prisoner in British India felt like. Ananda had discussed it often with Makhon. A foot inserted beneath his belly flipped him over in one quick movement. He shrieked in pain and shock. A hand had by then grabbed him by the hair jerking his head up. A pair of deep blue eyes, the bluest he had ever seen, peered into his. 'Who brought the material for the cartridges?'

'Nothing.' Ganesh-da's voice, louder than ever, came to his ears. 'Bastards, let him go.' Loka-da's voice. Blank out your mind. Don't let the answer slip out because of the pain. Ananda repeated the teaching in his mind. A blow to his face brought his focus back on the man above him. 'How did you come to Calcutta? Where did you stay?' The bulbous face was now inches away. There was a spray of spittle along with the questions. He gasped drawing in a ragged breath of fetid air, and the vomit that had been bubbling for so long within poured out in a volcanic flow.

The ink blue of the predawn hours had given way to light. His rapidly swelling eyelids cut off the onslaught of what promised to be a bright day. He struggled to his feet, lost his balance and was dragged upright. They were being removed from the compound, handcuffed and bound with rope at the waist. The streets were thronged with people. They wept, folded their hands and bowed their heads ... The police vans sped through the crowded lanes to the office of the French commissaire du police. This part had been rehearsed many times before: do not answer any question ... all questions to be answered in court alone. Ananda had been dimly aware that Putu-di's face looked swollen and bruised – how, he wondered, had she merited this treatment when Mrs Farrell had escaped with not so much as the touch of a hand? He heard Shashadhar-da's name being called though he couldn't really see him. But ... there was something else that was amiss.

The sun shone with a relentless fury for so early an hour. The vans were waiting to whisk them away. Why were Putu-di and Shashadharda going with them? They belonged here in Chandannagar. Chandannagar had emptied itself on to its streets. Schools and colleges, it appeared, had shut down for the day. The people braved the police to raise slogans. Bande Mataram; long live revolution! Emotions were running high.

Snatches of conversation caught Ananda's ear. 'They have dragged the bottom of the pukur. They have found the body.' He fell to his knees, weeping uncontrollably. Makhon had said he would be right behind him.

Shaheed Kanailal's Chandannagar was throbbing with passion, bursting with patriotic fervour. As the police vans left for Hooghly, young and old in the French colony began to prepare for a ceremonial funeral – the likes of which had never been seen in Chandannagar before.⁶

ANANTA LAL SINGH

The tedium of the court continued day after day but every now and then Sarat Babu seemed to pull something out of his sleeve. Today, it was a copy of the Statesman. He waited for Mr Younie to settle down before drawing his attention to the editorial: HAS MR SARAT BOSE'S THREE MONTHS OF AHIMSA BEEN WASHED AWAY BY THE GLAMOUR OF DEFENDING ANANTA LAL SINGH?

Turning to the editor of the Statesman he sneered, 'I damn care for the barking of a cur masquerading under the borrowed hide of a British lion!'

'Mr Bose, please repeat.' Mr Younie's voice had a dangerous edge to it.

Sarat Babu repeated himself in ringing tones.

After a stunned silence Mr Younie decided to back down. 'A dreadful simile indeed.'

'The only appropriate one that I can use at this moment.' Turning to the editor, Sarat Babu gave him the full benefit of his wrath. 'An apology by tomorrow in print or I sue.'

Mr Younie buried himself in his papers.

All Chattogram was counting on this fiery prince of barristers to get the boys through. He could, they were certain, save them from the noose and perhaps get

a number of the younger ones off without long jail sentences. The people themselves were labouring under the effects of a police state: in the name of the law, atrocities were being committed; young and old beaten indiscriminately; passes of various colours – red, blue, white, had been issued and citizens expected to carry them all the time; all processions and gatherings had been banned.

The jail was suddenly buzzing with activity. Even before Ananta had arrived, the jail had arranged for extra security; with his arrival another paltan had been requisitioned. But now, new arrangements were appearing every day. The inspector general of prisons came personally. New postings were announced: both the posts of jailor and the warder were to be occupied by British officers. It was a first for Chattogram. Some twenty-odd carefully chosen Hindustani sipahis on the brink of retirement with pension had been brought in to guard the inmates – never had armed guards been posted inside the jail! One company of Eastern Frontier Rifles, about 150 men, was attached and masons, carpenters and labourers trudged in and out all day carrying planks of wood and bags of cement. Overnight, the jail appeared to have changed ... the sounds of marching, changing of guard, handing-taking over of duties, the thump of boot heels, slapping of rifle butts, the senior officers' rounds ... the halts and the who-comes-theres could be heard over and above the drilling and banging that came from the first floor.

ANANDA PRASAD GUPTA

Ananda wept all the way. There was little that would comfort him. He had never wept so much, not even on that day when Loka-da had broken the news that Dada had been martyred at Kalarpol. Today, there was no pride; no sense of accomplishment; just a hollow emptiness. Makhon had been his friend since that first day in kindergarten and today his body peppered with bullets had slid ever so silently into the depths of the pukur.

‘I thought he had jumped in. I dived in behind him not realizing he had been shot.’ Loka-da said miserably. He had cautiously broken the surface of the water to take a look around. ‘The water came up to just below my nostrils ... I stood

like that for God alone knows how long. There seemed to be no end to the firing ... suddenly, a blow caught me on the head.'

It was a day of revelations. Putu-di, who tried so desperately to comfort him even now, drawing him close to herself, had been accused of not being Shashadhar-da's wife. They were both members of Jugantar, Kolkata, who had volunteered their services. Suhashini Ganguli, for that was her real name, had been a surrogate mother to Makhon and him all these months and would now go to prison like the rest of them.

The thought of prison brought a sudden end to the sobbing. It was to be his first time. The vans came to a stop and the jailor babu took them in through the gates of Hooghly Jail. Ananda peered about with a sense of wonder, one that he had not experienced since he'd been a little child. Jailor babu's lips twisted into a smile.

'So,' he said to Ganesh-da. 'Now you've taken to snatching the tender ones from their mother's arms?' There was a familiarity which seemed to say that he and Ganesh-da were old acquaintances.

'Not much choice is there? When adults like you have chosen to be tamed, these little ones are forced to come forward.'

The smile faded and the jailor babu turned briskly to business. The three revolutionaries were placed in separate cells and Suhashini-di and Shashadhar-da moved to a different section of the jail. The jail doctor arrived to take a look at Ananda's leg. He was a kindly man who spoke little. He knelt by his side on the floor, dressed the bullet wound and administered a shot of morphine, promising to be back the next day. The lunch bell rang and food trays clattered on to the ground as they were pushed in through the bars. His thoughts returned in a flash to those hours earlier that day, when they had all been free, when Makhon had been alive and looking forward to that promised meal. He reached out to pull the tray towards him and then shrank back in disgust. It reeked. The stench in the rice was unbearable and the slop, that had been handed out in lieu of dal or vegetables made him gag. But the hunger that raged in the pit of his stomach would not relinquish its hold. Tentatively, holding his breath, he scooped up a little of the rice with his fingers. His teeth grated against sand and pieces of stone.

The blackness of the cell threw up images more clearly than it was possible to believe. Makhon began to laugh softly, his breath moist and warm against Ananda's face as he whispered into his ear: the cheque of Rs 5,000/- ... Ananda-da says the signature does not match my Baba's, but the second one ... the 1,800/- one does. The passing officer says that the cheque number is far behind the ones yet to be encashed, but my bicycle is waiting right outside.

Ananda giggled but Makhon's face had begun growing dark: I have tucked in the money into Ganesh-da's curtains already. Baba is strangling me ... Ma is screaming, weeping because I am dead. But I am only pretending! I can wake up when I want to. I don't want to just yet.

Makhon faded away and Taracharan Sadhu appeared angrily pushing him into a pukur, holding him down with his staff. Jogendramohan Babu has lost a gold chain, he says. Deboprasad knows who has taken it. Taracharan Sadhu's face begins to grow blurry. The inches of water above his face are increasing. His chest threatens to burst. The incessant mosquitoes provided a welcome break from the nightmare and Ananda gulped greedily at the warm night air.

Early the next day, a police van took Ananda, Ganesh-da and Loka-da to Kolkata's famous Lalbazar Thana. The jail staff was agog with curiosity. Sergeants jostled with each other to catch a glimpse. The hunt was over; the prey was in the net. Ananda was led to his cell and the barred door closed behind him. Two blankets lay on the floor; once again it was the stench that got to him. It was a peculiar smell of urine and sweat and stale food that seemed to have worked itself into the walls and the floor. He sat down in a corner as far as possible from the blankets wondering at the number and kind of people that had used them time and again.

A sergeant stood outside the door. 'Lunch order please.'

Ananda stared at him in surprise. Could he really be asking him? He had not yet got over the food experience at Hooghly Jail. 'Whatever you please,' he said.

The man returned a little later with a plate of hot porothas and a bowl of potato curry. Ananda stared suspiciously at the plate and then at the white-skinned sergeant. Why was a white man being so good to him? Because he was the youngest? Because he would be the easiest of the lot to break?

The man seemed to read his mind for he laughed. 'Your friends have been given

the same food. Now eat up.'

Ananda pushed the plate away. 'I am not hungry.' He would not look up or look the sergeant in the eye.

The man was back in a few minutes with his bunch of keys. 'Come,' he said kindly. 'Have a word with your friend.' And he led him to Ganesh-da's cell. The sight of Ganesh-da eating was a great relief.

'Ja,' he said, 'it is good food ... go and eat.'

DOROTHY YOUNIE

Wednesday, 3 September 1930

[7](#)

DRAMATIC RAID BY CALCUTTA POLICE

TERRORISTS CAPTURED

IN FRENCH TERRITORY

CALCUTTA, TUESDAY.

A Bengali was killed and four injured in a dramatic revolver fight between the police and native terrorists in Chandernagore, in French territory, early this morning. Led by Sir Charles Tegart; whose life was recently attempted, a force of 20 police and detectives quietly surrounded a house in the thick of the jungle. When the lookout man raised the alarm, the men rushed from the house and fired with their revolvers. The police replied with revolvers and shotguns and arrested one man who was sheltering in a pond. Two others who attempted to escape

were fired on and captured.

All were arrested and found to have revolvers and large supplies of ammunition. The body of another was found in the pond. The police entered the house and arrested another man and discovered a large quantity of tools and metal.

Some of those arrested are said to have been involved in the Chittagong revolt some years ago. All are imprisoned at Chandernagore, pending extradition to British India. The raid was carried out with the sanction of the French authorities.

Did you read of the capture of some more of the Chittagong raiders ... in a lonely house in Chandernagore? Dorothy was writing to John's sister, Annie. They had been friends from well before the wedding. A thrilling story, what? All are among the principal members of the gang. John expects that all the work of the last six weeks will be scrapped and they will have to start all over again. Of course he will not go altogether without a break ... should have 10–14 days at the end of the month but it's too short a time for all of us to go off. John in any case cannot move without his guards but we hope the weather will be less trying than it is now.

The Chandernagore encounter had been the result of intensive detective work, followed on the heels of an attempt on the police commissioner's life and the murder of the IG police, Mr F.J. Lowman. Benoy Krishna Basu's⁸ pictures were pasted on every wall announcing a reward of Rs 10,000/-.

It was going to be difficult holding a conversation with John soon, much less to say 'No'. His smoking worried her, and she figured he was taking full advantage of being a more than usually occupied person. But on the whole, he was thriving despite the two plain-clothes shadows⁹ that kept turning up at each tee or green as he concentrated on the ball. Though the course was visible from the road, those unaware of the shadow would have thought him, as he strolled along under his umbrella, anything but the most ordinary half-asleep passer-by.

The trial was receiving a lot of publicity being touted as the worst attempt of its kind in the history of Bengal with the Statesman giving it a column a day. The local vernacular papers were all together full of it, going to the extent of publishing an evening edition. The happy home letters were the best antidote to

the current affairs in Bengal.

ANANDA PRASAD GUPTA, 3 SEPTEMBER 1930

The armed police had arrived with handcuffs and rope.

‘Where are we going today?’

‘Sealdah station and then to Chattogram.’

Ananda’s heart lurched. He was going home.

A large contingent of armed police awaited them at the station. They clambered into a large first-class carriage accompanied by four sergeants, a senior British officer, a team of armed Garhwal police and their havaldar. Two seats ran longitudinally with two overhead electric fans. The glass windows, tinted against the glare, had gauze shutters on the outside to keep insects away. A door opened and the gleam of white tiles caught Ananda’s eye: there was an attached bathroom and toilet that went with the carriage. Indians, as a rule, never got to see the insides of first- and second-class carriages. Even the interim class was meant for Parsees and Anglo-Indians alone. The train chugged off towards Gwaland. He was on his way home ... it had been a long while coming, but sadly, it was not to be the glorious return that he had dreamt of.

Three first-class cabins had been kept aside for them on the steamer that would take them from Gwaland to Chandpur. Ananda sat in his cabin, alone with his thoughts. The officer knocked at the door and came in.

‘You all right? The leg giving you trouble?’

He would have been around fifty and looked to be a gentle soul. He came in and asked for permission to sit.

‘How old are you?’

‘Nearly sixteen.’

‘And how far have you studied.’

‘I have finished my matriculation.’

He kept quiet. Then he spoke, his meticulous slowness seeming to mock Ananda’s intelligence. ‘At this tender age you have gotten involved in a tremendously courageous work. But, have you thought about the troubles and pain it will bring to your young life and to those of your parents?’

Jalalabad and Kalarpol’s shaheeds flashed before his eyes. Jibon’s face haunted him. He could not wait for the white man’s speech to end. If he could, he would have stopped the flow of words immediately.

‘Do you feel no regret? You may have got caught up in the moment not realizing what you were getting into.’

It was a voice that could not be trusted. Not that his spoken English was very good but like an excited child Ananda took off. ‘No, no regret whatsoever. We are ready for whatever consequences have to be faced. If we are hanged, we will consider ourselves fortunate. You must be aware of the history of the Irish braves. Many youth have given their lives to free their land. Their example has served to encourage us. What bigger honour than to give your life for your country ...’ He barely recognized his own voice. He regretted having spoken at all.

The sahib kept quiet and looked steadily at him for a while.

‘Look, I have a son exactly like you. He studies in Darjeeling. I look at you and am reminded of him. I must be the same age as your father. There is still time. Go back home to your old life. Tell the authorities whatever you know. They will let you go. Your life is just beginning. You can work at a good job, run a business ... prosper in life. Don’t throw away your life like this. You will suffer, as will your parents.’

So now it was the fatherly advice. Vengeance glowed within Ananda’s chest like a dark star. ‘I have said whatever I had to. We are proud of everything we have done.’ He had brought the strange conversation to an abrupt end.

The sahib got up and left.

The conversation had left him feeling angry and drained. He lay down on the bunk, pressing his face into the pillow, squeezing his eyes to stop the tears that threatened to spill when he suddenly realized he was not alone. The cabin door had been left partially open and the Garhwali havaldar was standing in the doorway. Seeing that he was up, the man took a careful look around, stepped inside and shut the door softly behind him. Ananda turned away, bent on ignoring him. He was still smarting from the last encounter. And it was best not to speak with the police at all. The havaldar made no move to come closer or sit down. Ananda could feel his gaze pressing down upon him.

‘Babu-ji, are your parents alive?’

Ananda looked up startled. The dark eyes were sorrowful.

‘Yes. Please sit.’

He looked worried. ‘No, I must not be seen talking to you. Achchha, babu-ji. How old are you? You must be very young. No?’

‘I am nearly sixteen.’

‘Now that they are taking you to Chattogram, what will become of you? What kind of punishment will you be awarded?’

‘Don’t know exactly, but probably hanging.’

‘Aah. Your poor parents.’

‘Yes, that they are in great pain and will be subject to more is true. But, to save this dying country, youths like us must come forward. At least a few will have to face the pain of sacrifice and tyranny to show the countrymen the way. Every country has had to go through this. If everyone sat at home peacefully, would our independence be restored by itself? Is that ever possible?’ Ananda replied in broken Hindi.

The havaldar listened with grave attention, his face lined with shame and pain.

‘You are absolutely right, babu-ji. You are different from us. Leaving your homes, mothers, fathers, your happiness ... you have thrown it all away and have come forward for the country ... for all of us. We understand all of it. We

are ordinary people, leading regular lives with wives and children. We are forced into slavery by our empty stomachs. But understand that though we serve them, we have not sold our minds. When the opportunity arises ... wait and see ... we will be there beside you.' His eyes were moist and bright.

The steamer's pipes sounded the arrival at Chandpur. Quickly regaining his composure, the havaladar left the cabin.

4 SEPTEMBER 1930

He was home. He was back in Chattogram. The station was quiet that morning; the usual lot of travellers and a team of coast guard sailors who had come to assume charge. Nobody seemed to take the slightest bit of interest in them.

'They have kept our arrival a complete secret,' Loka-da muttered. But as they drove down the familiar lanes, Ananda gazed in amazement at what used to be home. Chattogram had turned into a virtual cantonment. There was khaki everywhere; streets heavily patrolled; companies of soldiers marching down the road in the company of their sergeants ... the sounds and the sights of Chattogram had changed completely. But when the cars turned and Chattogram Jail came into view, his jaw dropped. It had been turned into a fort. The jail, with its towering walls, that he had always taken to be impregnable, now had a company of Gurkhas of the Eastern Frontier Rifles camping right outside the gates. A barbed-wire fence ran all the way around; Gurkhas manned the gates; machine guns were positioned on top of the two jail offices and reflectors lined the perimeter wall. It was as if he were walking into a movie set.

The doors swung open and he followed Ganesh-da and Loka-da in. Suddenly the jail erupted with boisterous cheering ... Bande Mataram, Inquilab Zindabad! The undertrial yard had received wind of their arrival. Dr Srighyan Chatterji hurried them into the jail office. He knew each of them well.

'Please keep us with the other prisoners.' Ganesh-da spoke for all of them.

'Sorry.' Gyan Babu waved his hands. 'That is a decision for the authorities to

take but if there is anything else, I will be happy to oblige.'

An identification parade had been arranged. The Feni railway station staff had been picked up by the same train that had brought the three to Chattogram. Ananda had seen them earlier in the day inside their compartment, peering over the policemen's shoulders. Sub-inspector Jatindra Mohan Rai and Inspector Abdul Mohammad Fazal Wasid did not raise their eyes to look up at them. They just nodded and left. 'The pressure of being dependent on a government job,' sighed Ganesh-da.

They were led into individual cells in a solitary confinement block. 'At least,' thought Ananda, 'If we shout we will be able to hear each other.'

'Ki rey?' Gyan Babu had come in with a junior doctor to take a look at his leg. 'Making the old man weep?'

'No one in the land will feel any pain and yet the country will be liberated. Is that possible?'

Gyan Babu snorted and got down to dressing the wound. 'You will stay here until the leg is better and then you can join the others in the hajat-ghar.' Having neatened him up, he peered into his face. 'Your face is still quite a sight, but come. Your mother and grandmother are waiting.'

Ananda stared in horror. Had they already managed permission to meet him? They would see him like this as a prisoner? He limped behind Gyan Babu across to the superintendent's office next to the jail gate.

Ma and Thakur-Ma burst into tears on seeing him. In the few months that he had been away, he had grown. Grown so much that he towered over them. The two women folded him into their arms. The deputy jailor babu politely stepped aside. Chotkun stood aside, suddenly shy of the tall stranger who was his dada. Finally, he pushed himself through the folds of the saris. 'Dada,' he said. 'Ma has brought you a cake.'

'Where's Baba?' Ananda peered over his mother's shoulder.

'At home, my love ... he cannot come.'

'Gone ... his mind has gone.' Thakur-Ma murmured, as her eyes, milky with

cataracts, glistened. She blinked away her tears as Ananda turned in panic to his mother.

‘He could not withstand the beatings at jail and has lost his mind. And then Khoka’s news came ... he barely talks now ... but he is at home. They let him out on bail.’ Then looking at Ananda’s face crumple she said, ‘None of the fathers were spared.’

‘Ma,’ he asked. ‘Do you want me to confess? Do you want me to come back home?’

‘Never.’ Ma straightened herself and tightened her grip on his shoulders. ‘Such a vile thought has never crossed my mind. You must not break down. Remember your mother is strong. I have lost Khoka but he has left my heart bursting with pride. And though I have no idea as to what will become of you, I do not want any son of mine to be called a traitor.’

A load had been lifted. Brushing the tears off her cheeks he gave in to her caresses. Chotkun was admiring the great big bandage on his leg. Ananda laughed. His little brother longed to be a soldier.

There was a soft cough. Their twenty minutes were up; deputy jailor babu gently reminded them.

‘Kan?’ Thakur-Ma rounded on him, her grizzled grey eyebrows flapping. She peered at him fiercely. ‘Kan kuri minuter beshi tomago ei jal khanaye roun jaibo na?’ The village dialect of her native Brikampur in Dhaka took deputy jailor babu completely by surprise, but the meaning had not escaped him – why can I not stay in your jail for more than twenty minutes?

‘What can I do, Ma? It is all that is permitted.’ He was at his diplomatic best but failed to make an impression on Thakur-Ma.

Thakur-Ma’s temper was shooting up. ‘Amago aicho aeen shikhaitey? ... You? You have come to teach us about law?’ she shrilled. ‘Tomago lehan onek police daikha-aichee. Ei aami roilam aar ei aamar naati roilo. Dekhi othao to dekhi. Koto tomar aeener jor ... I have seen many like you. Here I will stay, as will my grandson. Let me see how you can get me to leave. Let me see what your so-called law is made of!’

Deputy jailor babu stared bewildered. Ananda clenched his teeth trying to stop himself from bursting into giggles. A grin tugged at the corners of his mouth as he turned to hug his fiery grandmother. 'See, Thakur-Ma, I am all right. I am not going to cry.'

ANANTA LAL SINGH, SUNDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 1930

A legal interview had been scheduled for that day. Ananta waited eagerly for the call. He was to meet with Sarat Babu in the jail superintendent's office. His mind grappled over the points of law that Sarat Babu may wish to discuss. The call came in the afternoon. Sarat Babu was already seated in Gyan Babu's chair. Ananta took the chair opposite him. The jailor Mr Jones remained standing as was prescribed by the law.

'Well, jailor,' said Sarat Babu. 'The legal interview is to be held NOT within hearing BUT within sight.'

'Oh! Yes, sir.' Mr Jones removed himself not only from within hearing but also from within sight.

Sarat Babu turned to Ananta. 'Can you escape from jail?'

'I could try.'

'Keep trying. Break out of jail. I will fund it. How much do you need?'

'As of now, five thousand.'

'You shall have it. Now let's get down to the nitty-gritty. Who will be the go-between? Whom will I hand the money over to?'

Ananta dropped his voice. 'Six are being let out on bail. Ardhendu Guha ... we can trust him.'

'How old is he.'

‘Seventeen.’

‘A shishu! No more than an infant!

Shishu became Ardhendu’s code name.

‘And he is being watched ... Hmmm. Looking for Surjya Sen! This part of the trial is to be declared null and void.’

Ananta looked up in surprise. Sarat Babu wagged his eyebrows at him. ‘You obviously have missed out on the news headlines – MIDNIGHT REVOLVER BATTLE IN CHANDANNAGAR? Now that they are here already, the government has decided to start the trial all over again. I, unfortunately, cannot stay much longer. So we have to get you new counsel.’

He had heard! A sipahi had whispered the news to him ... news that had left him reeling: three arrested, one dead. Who had died? If one had died, two should have been arrested, for he had left Ganesh, Makhon and Ananda behind. If Putudi and Shashadhar-da had been arrested, the number should have been four. But who was dead? The question had screamed inside Ananta’s head but how could he have found out? No newspapers came to the jail and there was no way he could have asked anyone, for court proceedings had abruptly been stopped since the last couple of days. Ananta Lal Singh had tied himself up in knots of his own making. He had mourned and wailed silently berating himself ever since.

‘There are boys still going undefended.’ Sarat Babu was saying clearly unaware of the turmoil that raged within Ananta’s head. ‘Srish Bose of Chandannagar will represent them. I will pay his fees.’

‘You may choose your own legal counsel or you may choose to defend yourself. The outcome will not be any different, for it has already been decided. The only reason the Chandannagar captives have been brought back here and are not being tried in Chandannagar, as they rightfully should be, is because French law does not permit capital punishment. They are still negotiating the extradition which will have to be passed by the highest court in France. It is completely against the law but, you know, imperial governments are in collusion with each other.¹⁰ A representation will be made from our side to the governor of Pondicherry.¹¹ It will give us more time in hand. Your strategy should now be to gain time by delaying the proceedings of the court. Cross-examine every witness for as long as possible, fall sick as often as you can ... the court proceedings will

have to be stopped on those days. It should give you and your boys time to blow up the jail.'

The legal consultation went on for two hours. '... little tricks, I am sure you have observed the lawyers employ: repeat your words a couple of times over as if rephrasing them for precision's sake; when the president doubts the relevancy of a question, answer with an "oh it is relevant all right and I am prepared to explain its significance, but the witness must go out of the courtroom first"; take immediate offence to the slightest insinuation that you may be attempting to influence the witness and refuse to move ahead, unless the bench withdraws its remarks; and most important of all, if the witness volunteers more than what was required by your question, insist on having it expunged from the records at once. ... It should take another three months.' Sarat Babu was winding up. 'I will be back in Chattogram before that.'

SIX

ANANTA LAL SINGH, 11 SEPTEMBER 1930

The trial was to be conducted within the jail. Ananta was being led up the stairs. My mind must have weakened, he blamed himself, for his heart tumbled at the thought of coming face-to-face with those he had abandoned.

The dock for the accused was right beside the door. Ganesh appeared to be waiting for him, for, as he entered, he gripped him tightly by the hand and without a word clasped him to his chest. Ananta stood unresisting. Lokenath reached out to squeeze his shoulder. 'We've heard of the retractions,' he said. Ananta wasn't quite sure what to make of it but the ache in his gut seemed to have lessened. He looked at the other faces searchingly. Ananda smiled shyly, extending his arm. So it was Makhon who had not made it. He squeezed himself in next to Ananda, kissing the top of his head. 'I am sorry,' he said. 'He was a good friend, wasn't he?'¹

A courtroom had been constructed within the last couple of days. The two large rooms meant to house the ordinary convicts had been converted into a large hall. A platform with two levels had been provided at the far end: the upper one for the tribunal members and the lower one for the clerks. The centre had been laid out with chairs and tables with a dock for the witness by the side. A separate stand had been constructed close to the tribunal's platform for the lone confessor. He had to be kept as far away as possible from the accused. As for a public gallery or arrangements for the press, there simply wasn't any, for this trial was closed to outsiders. What a farce, thought Ananta.

The tribunal members took their seat at 10.30 sharp but the opening was a noisy, boisterous one. Akhil Chandra Dutt, the barrister from Kumilla, had had a heated argument with the jail superintendent. He was still raging and decided to take up the matter in the court.

‘I object to being frisked. I am not concerned at all with the jail. I have come to court to defend my client. What do I care for jail rules? They do not concern me at all. I refuse to attend as a captive lawyer and I protest against the legality of being searched. I insist on attending as a free lawyer, else my client will go undefended.’

His agitation was taken up by the entire defence team. The guardians and the lawyers had all been searched according to jail rules. Mr Younie for once was in agreement. It was the first little victory for the day.

The public prosecutor began once again. The last time, he had taken a week before starting on the witnesses. Ananta, Ganesh and Lokenath had chosen to represent themselves. But for a large number of boys, legal counsel would have to be hired. Ananta looked across to where the relatives sat. There was no sign of Didi. Most of the boys had heard the public prosecutor before and had settled down to chatting softly among themselves.

There were six that were out on bail: Sripati Choudhury, Subodh Bal, Vijay Sen, Ardhendu Guha, Anil Rakshit and Madhusudan Guha. Each one had been formally introduced to their six personal detectives who were to keep a watch on their movements. The detectives had parked themselves in the respective homes and accompanied the boys whenever they set foot outside. Ananta and Ganesh happened to sit with Ardhendu between them. The boy had brought a Gita with him and sat rocking back and forth. His lips moved constantly and silently chanting the verses. The censor had flipped through every page and had passed it.

‘Before you cross the river make sure you’ve been “filtered”.’ Ganesh muttered to no one in particular. An innocent old beggar ... crone ... anyone that you see more than once on any of the lanes ... better to go back home that day.’

The public prosecutor had just cleared his throat when a voice called out. ‘Your Honour, I would like to make a statement.’

The bench turned to Lal Mohan Sen.

‘Well, speak out.’

‘The statement I made to the SDO was not a voluntary one. I beg to withdraw the statement here and now. The eyes that hid behind the spectacles so long

gazed unblinking and firm.

What had not been achieved in all these days, Ananda had achieved in one. The sight of his friend and mentor limping in with the other accused had helped Lal Mohan get over his predicament. He who had led his team and neatly executed his responsibility, ripping out the railway tracks and disrupting the telegraph lines without a hitch, had given way to family pressure. His father's elder brother, the zamindar of Sandwip Island, had arm-twisted him into buying back the security of a comfortable life. But here stood Ananda, two encounters old, mourning a brother and a close friend and yet unwavering in his belief.

The public prosecutor and the investigation officer exchanged glances of dismay and ASP Shooter looked ready to reach out and cuff Lal Mohan. But Mr Younie looked long and hard at the boy who was to serve as a trump card before shaking his head and getting down to documenting the retraction.

It was a great victory. The boy had been hand-reared, so to say, by Ananda and Debu and had been coaxed into giving up smoking, joining the Sadarghat Club and starting a physical culture club in his village. His own leanings had driven him to invest his allowance on nationalist newspapers, a commodity that drew like-minded youths to his hostel room at the National School. Ananda who lived close by had been a frequent visitor, and a lasting bond had developed.

‘Sarat Babu offered to send Master-da abroad saying it was the responsibility of the nation to ensure that leaders like him survive.’ Ardhendu intoned in barely a whisper. ‘Master-da has declined ... seventeen have laid down their lives ... he will not leave the side of those waiting to lay down theirs.’²

The public prosecutor had wound up for the day. The boys out on bail were let out of the dock first. Ardhendu jumped to his feet. His Gita was left behind on the bench.

PREMLATA

‘I will be leaving tomorrow.’ Premlata's husband did not look up from his plate.

‘It may be weeks before I will return.’

She did not question him. She never did. Not when he left the house, nor when he returned; and never why he chose not to share her bed. She did not crave for the finer things in life nor worry that her husband was unable to provide more than a meagre subsistence. Despite the lateness of the hour, she was warm and welcoming and made sure his food was fresh and hot. She would remain by his side until he had finished his meal. She had no objections to his way of life ... she after all was a Hindu wife and from an extremely humble background, one who had been saved from public humiliation by the graciousness of this man. What say could she possibly have in the matters that concerned men?

‘Go you must,’ she said. ‘But do not forget to give me an opportunity.’

Kali gazed at her thoughtfully. He had won himself an unexpected ally.

‘Phutu-da ... that is Tarakeshwar Dastidar ... he came to the wedding. He has to go to Kolkata on urgent business. It is extremely dangerous for him. He needs a good disguise. Master-da has asked whether you are prepared to accompany him and pretend to be his wife?’

Premlata drew the edge of her sari across her face as tears prickled her eyelids.³

ANANTA LAL SINGH, MONDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 1930

Subodh Choudhury who had picked up Ardhendu’s Gita had spent the weekend chanting the verses aloud. The hajat-ghar seemed to be affected by the mood. The boys remained deferentially calm.

Ardhendu had a Gita with him when he came in on Monday. Both Subodh and he settled down in a corner to spend the day chanting quietly to themselves.

‘Withdraw that statement!’ Lokenath bellowed at the top of his voice. It took everybody by surprise.

‘What now?’ Ananta was taken completely aback.

‘You take your statement back.’ Lokenath had a powerful voice and was putting it to good effect.

‘Something the public prosecutor said?’ Ganesh and Ananta, who had been scribbling away, raised their heads eagerly above the railing.

Mr Younie tried to restore order.

‘Lokenath, please stop.’ Mr Johnson had come up to the dock.

‘I will not. This is a complete farce.’

‘Page numbers 205, 700 and 1005,’ murmured Subodh as he put his Gita down. Ardhendu put his beside Subodh’s and stood up to view the proceedings.

Mr Shooter burst into the dock and strode right in to where Lokenath was standing. Ananta ran after him as the boys sprang to their feet. The sergeants found themselves at the entrance, unable to push their way in. It was a moment fraught with anxiety. Suddenly, Mr Shooter was sandwiched between Lokenath and Ananta, separated from his sergeants by boys twitching for a signal from their leaders.

‘Mr Shooter! Remove yourself from the dock at once.’ Mr Younie’s voice rang out clear and cold.

The proceedings were declared closed for the day. Everyone’s nerves were on edge.

Ardhendu picked up one of the Gitas and left. Not only were the police and jail authorities to be steered clear of, he also couldn’t afford to be noticed by the boys in the dock, for only ten of the thirty had been included in the conspiracy. Ananta and Ganesh had worked out a cipher. The key had been marked in invisible ink on a couple of the pages and a brief message on another: Master-da, we have planned to blow up the jail.

Creating the cipher had brought back bitter-sweet memories of corresponding with the traitor Premananda, whom Ananta had believed to be a friend. Though he had used a cipher, he had begun the letter with a ‘Dear Premananda’ and ended it with a ‘Yours sincerely’. Even without cracking the code one could have made out it was a letter. This time he had cut out the frills, going as far as cutting

out even the spaces used between words in regular writing.

At the zero hour the jail wall will be blown up.

At the zero hour our companions outside will throw hand bombs at the two sentry posts at the two corners of the jail. While the sentries are diverted we will escape.

Dhiren Das and Robi Sen will wait at the appointed site with a truck. Both are good drivers.

Two sampans will be waiting at the appointed site on the Karnaphuli. Manindra Majumdar will wait for us. He and Sukhendu Dastidar are good with sampans. Manindra will lead us to the shelter.

‘The last puja of my life.’ Ananta reached out to take the dust off Gyan Babu’s feet. ‘It’s Bijoya Dashami today, Ma has turned her face away from me ... this is the last time that I get to touch your feet.’

The old doctor was visibly moved. He clasped Ananta to his chest. ‘We can only pray. You have all of Chittagong’s prayers with you.’

The puja holidays had begun on 23 September and Ananta had sat alone in his cell since then.

‘Gyan Babu, had the court not been shut for the whole week, we would have been meeting each other, but this last week ... I have been feeling very lonely. Could you not permit Ganesh and Lokenath to eat with me this evening? I know you will have to keep the zila administrator and the SP informed and,’ he hastened to add, ‘I promise, we will behave as calm, well-behaved people. We will make sure we follow all the rules and return to the lock-up when it’s time.’

Durga Puja – the time of the year when the mother goddess returns to earth, to the bosom of her maternal family – is a time when Bengali sentiments run high ... a time of celebration, a time of coming together.

The jail superintendent had succeeded in persuading the authorities to let them have an hour together and, even though the guards had surrounded them throughout that time, the mood had been a celebratory one. Master-da had sent back a reply: go right ahead. Verbally, he had told Ardhendu: if Ananta and

Ganesh can make this plan work, it will make greater history than the armoury raid. Didi had left for Kolkata immediately to collect that promised five thousand rupees from Sarat Babu. This one evening spent together was just the first inroad. One by one they would seek more advantages. Until then, model behaviour would be required. Soon it would be Lokenath's turn to look depressed and when prodded he would come out with: we are together every day at court ... But on Sundays we are in jail sitting in our cells. Couldn't we all be together until lock-up on Sundays? We wouldn't be any trouble. Sitting in the cell all alone ... it feels really bad. Life ... every day is numbered now.

Then again on an opportune day they would plead for a breath of fresh air: it's court and cell and cell and court. If only we could sit for a while in the open area within the jail ... your soldiers would be all around keeping watch ... it would take the exhaustion away. After dinner we will go back into our cells without a fuss ... and besides, jailor babu, your sergeants, warders would all be by our side keeping watch ... we won't venture a step beyond our permissible boundaries.

LADY KATHLEEN TEGART, 25 SEPTEMBER TO EARLY OCTOBER 1930

She had caught the first ship back as soon as she got the news. Through the journey she had suffered anxiety attacks. Mike had had such a close call and there was no way he could come away for that promised break, not with the terrible condition Bengal was in. The raid in Chandernagore and the arrest of the three Chittagong ringleaders with Mike in the forefront ... she shuddered at the thought of how precariously her husband clung to life. One never knew what waited around the corner ... the way they had lost poor Mr Lowman. He had been a good friend to them. Lowman's the sort of fellow to have with you in a tight corner, Mike had said many a time. And now he was dead and gone.

Calcutta had changed. Kathleen couldn't stand it any more. Mike was continually busy and she wandered about the house haunted by spectres that jumped out at her. Terrorists crept into every waking moment. She instructed the orderlies to check beneath the beds and the tables every morning and every night. Tell me if anything appears even remotely strange or different, she told

them.

It had been in January 1927, shortly after the arrest of the Hindustan Republican Association's B.K. Banerjee, that a curious incident had taken place in their home. Banerjee had plotted the assassination of her husband which was to be followed immediately by a spectacular bomb attack in the Legislative Assembly when Lord Lytton was to address it for the last time. The plot had been averted four days before it was to take place but with Banerjee's arrest, the Benares branch had swung into action. Contact was established with the Calcutta members and a quick plan was hatched: Lord Lytton's train was to be blown up while on its way to Bombay. Fortunately, their ideas were bigger than their powers of execution and the police had marched them all off to jail before anything could be accomplished. It had been during those very days that Mike, having returned from a Saturday morning's work at the office had been changing his clothes in the small dressing room on the ground floor, getting ready to go to lunch at the Races. Kathleen, who had been sitting on the bed chatting with him, had spotted a dark head emerging slowly from underneath. She had jumped up crying: Look out, there's a man! And Mike had, almost in one movement pushed her out through the swing doors, bent down, grabbed the man, dragged him out and overpowered him. He had turned out to be an unarmed naked man in a loin cloth and had at first feigned insanity. But when he'd been identified at the police station it had been found that there were three previous convictions for housebreaking against him. No assassination or conspiracy link had been established and it had remained a puzzle. But, the fact of the matter was that he had succeeded in making his way into the house in broad daylight.

By the time she had returned, one of the two sensational trials had come to an end. On 8 September, Judge R.R. Garlick, N.K. Bose and L.B. Das had pronounced Dinesh Majumdar guilty of all charges barring the murder of his colleague Anuja and had sentenced him to transportation for life.⁴ The second, Dr Narain Roy's case, was in court, generating much excitement. By his own confession recorded before the honorary magistrate on 8 September, he had acknowledged that he had been working for terrorist groups for the past eight months. In 1928, he had been elected president of a small library started by one of the extremist groups. He had been so impressed by their speeches that he decided to take an active part in working for India's immediate freedom. Since he had considerable scientific knowledge, he felt he would be able to offer his best by preparing explosives. Synthesizing tri-nitro-toluol had, at first, given him little success and so he had gone to Delhi to learn the method. In April 1930, he

had met a man named R. Das who was connected with the production of a newspaper called Swadhinata. He was soon convinced that Das was on to something big and took him into confidence. Das sent him empty bombshells which he filled and despatched to a certain address. The filling was a mixture called amatol which was three parts ammonium nitrate and one part TNT. All the bombs used in the recent spate of blasts had contained this mixture. But once in court, Dr Roy had repudiated the statement, saying it had been given under duress. In support of his statement he had said that the police who had searched his house on 25 September had left all the glass U tubes behind, thinking them to be part of a doctor's regular equipment and that he had voluntarily handed them over at a later date. All said and done, H.C. Stork, Ashutosh Ghose and Adiluzzaman Khan, on 27 November, found Dr Roy and a certain Dr B.C. Bose to be the most culpable of the group due to their medical training and their dominating personalities and sentenced them to transportation for twenty years.

Mike was being singularly nonchalant about the whole thing. While letters poured in, and congregations gathered to condemn the attack on his life and congratulate him on his miraculous escape, he continued with his everyday habits and brushed off all advice regarding special precautions. The home member, when he met with her, had described how he had unexpectedly walked into Mike's office a few days after the incidents. I found Mike and Mills, he said, having just finished an important discussion, racing Tim and Mills' bull terrier Boka⁵ across an improvised steeplechase course made up of chairs and wastepaper baskets.

Mr Hodson's letter lay on her writing table: I have come around at last after a long and painful struggle. It is to Dr Satish Ghose that I owe my life. I have been to visit Mr Lowman's grave at the Wari cemetery in Dacca ... There is a red sandstone headstone ...

KALPANA DUTT

The solemn-faced boy waited as Kalpana read the letter. Her lips parted in amazement as she quickly flipped the pages; a plan was being developed. Operations were to begin all over town as well as inside the jail. She would have

to take the responsibility of procuring nitric acid from Kolkata. The writer had signed off as ‘your Ananta-da’.

‘Ananta-da says nothing is impossible,’ said the boy.

The words were like a jolt of static. She had seen Ananta-da once before but that had been a long time ago: soon after her sixth birthday. A circus had come to town and the English stuntman had challenged the audience to match his feat of breaking out of heavy chains. A man had sauntered up and replicated the performance quite nonchalantly.⁶ He was to be emblazoned in her memory forever. Her Tun-kaka⁷ who had been holding her high up in the air for a better view had whispered: he is a revolutionary. You too must grow big and strong and fight for your country. Since July she had been avidly following the case. The Panchojanya referred to him as the Lion Cub. THE LION CUB CROSS-EXAMINES WITNESS - the catch phrase made the papers fly off the shelves. His name inspired confidence ... so what if Master-da was not ready to meet her, Ananta-da, the one who kept all women at arm’s length, had reposed his trust in her.

The boy had not shifted his gaze from her face. ‘So? Will you be able to do it?’ This had to be the Shishu mentioned in the letter.’

‘Of course!’

He had gone before she could say anything else.

A few days went by and then a fresh-faced child appeared at the kitchen door. ‘Nibaran Ghose.’⁸ The introduction was brief. ‘I will go with you to Kolkata.’

Taken aback by his presumptuousness, Kalpana pouted, ‘And how old are you?’

‘Fifteen soon.’ He handed her a slip of paper and ran away.

She had not gone back to college ever since it had reopened in July, feigning sickness. Now she would have to think of a way of joining back. It would be best to seek readmission in the second year itself, for that would give her time and access to the laboratory. The laboratory assistant could be easily bribed and he could gain access to other laboratories through his network. Also, the network in Kolkata was waiting to help: Kebla-da who had recently smuggled in three TNT bombs, some guncotton and some money; Purnendu Dastidar; Renu-di – Renu

Rai; Kamala-di – Kamala Banerjee.

ANANTA LAL SINGH, 10 OCTOBER 1930

Ambika-da had been arrested from Potiya the previous day. The boys on bail had broken the news. It had been a tip-off and Khan Sahib Ahsanulla had landed up with his men at the house. The newspapers carried gruesome versions of the way in which Ambika-da had been thrashed. But he was not being brought to Chattogram Jail, for he had been very sick for the past few months and was not stable enough to be kept in jail. He was being sent instead to Siuri. The boys handed over the two volumes of Encyclopaedia 'G' to Ganesh. The censor had let the books pass, finding them to be general education material.

The second stage of the revolution was in full swing: Didi had been sent on a mission to procure dynamite. She was to liaise with Noni-da, Kamini Babu's son, who had several contacts working in the coal mines. Ananta's cousin, Umesh Singh, had been put on the job at Agartala. And four places – a deserted brick kiln at Patharghata, Subodh Roy's village home at Kumira, Rakhal Sakha Basak's home across the river, Kali Kinkar De's and his uncle's home in the southern part of the city – had been dedicated to the making of gunpowder.

Master-da and Nirmal-da had procured many of the essentials and Ananta had been busy coordinating with his contacts in the jail: Mr Bloomfield and Mr Wright, the two European warders as well as some friendly sipahis.⁹ Ardhendu's eyebrows had jumped up in surprise, but the boy was a fast learner: the power of money could not be underestimated.

They had to have inside help, for the jail authorities used unpredictability as a precautionary measure. Handcuffs and shackles were applied at the drop of a hat. Bells clanged on and off and guards changed suddenly and without warning. Smuggling in goods was fraught with danger. But even in the middle of the desert, thirst finds a way of being quenched. The jail's trusted old jamadar, who wore four stripes and a crown on his uniform, had barely six months left before he retired on a comfortable pension. His job was to watch over the undertrials as well as the sipahis. He had already brought in five or six bottles of methylated

spirit, several packets of plaster of Paris, some coal and a spirit stove.

One of the revolutionary dadas had a saying: fish must be fried in its own fat.

DOROTHY YOUNIE

Dorothy lay in the shallows, half asleep, with Elspet seated within the crook of her arm, as the gentle ripples lapped around her legs sending an occasional wavelet to tickle the baby's feet. Chrissie and the other nannies had led their cavalcade off on a short walk armed with trowels, spades, baskets and buckets. The khansamas had pitched the cooking tent and had successfully set up the charcoal grill. They had arrived with their bag of game, bulging with hare, partridge, quail and snipe and had attracted a host of fishing boats that maintained a respectful distance as they bargained over their wares.

Life had got very restrictive in the last few days and even the rounds of golf had become few and far between. The trip had come as a great relief. The rains had lifted and a half-hearted second hot spell had begun to make its appearance. The sun had set itself out to recapture the moisture let loose during the preceding months with the result that Chittagong with its numerous tanks of water had turned into a cross between a laundry and the hot houses at the botanical gardens in England. But the countryside had been refreshing as it rolled by – the drab tints of summer having given way to luxuriant greenness that went with the month of November. What had once been scorched paddy fields were now huge green seas where the new season's jute and paddy were springing with astonishing swiftness. The nallas that had swelled to unfordable rivers had shrunk once again.

Cox's Bazar was a world away from reality: the deep-blue bay, the curve of pearl-white sand. Young Mrs Taitt slid into the water beside her, her hair decorated with tiny white flowers. She pointed to a dune covered in little bushes. A vigorous game of beach ball was being set up by Mrs Johnson. But Dorothy preferred to stay where she was. Elspet was enjoying herself, curling her toes and fingers into the moist sand.

With their men still busy at work it was the women that bonded together and supported each other. Three big Swiss-cottage tents had been set up to be shared by the ladies and the children while five small ones for the servants stood to a side.

The girls were back. They had been dipping and pottering among the pools like eager herons looking for the worms that left complicated swirling patterns like icing on a cake; ribbons of black shiny weed and tiny crabs that scuttled away whenever a rock was upturned.

‘Look.’ Helen held out a large pointed shell, the lip of which had been pulled into a series of pointed fingers.

Mary emptied the bunched-up skirt of her swimsuit to deposit a heap of cowry shells. ‘Smell,’ she said as she held her hands to her mother’s nose. They smelt horribly of garlic and she giggled naughtily as Dorothy grimaced.

‘She tried pulling of a sponge,’ explained Chrissie as she settled into the water and drew Elspet into her arms.

‘Look,’ said Dorothy, sorting through the pile, picking out a circular white conical limpet-like shell. ‘This one’s a Chinaman’s Hat and this,’ she held up a long conical brown shell twisted and pointed as a narwhal’s horn, ‘an Auger Shell’. There were gaily striped ones with zigzag patterns of brown and white, cowries and cockles that ranged from strong milky whites to delicate paper-thin mauves and peaches. The interiors glowed in opalescent sunset colours, quite magical in their beauty.

Lunch was being announced. The food had been placed on little tables and the bottles of wine dug out from the edge of the sea where they had been put to cool. The women installed themselves under the umbrellas. Outside the cookhouse tent an improvised wooden spit turned over the fire with seven fat snipe on it. The cook crouched by the side, the sweat running down his furrowed face and falling in gleaming drops. The fish was being served. Dorothy pulled apart the charred skin to allow the butter and lemon juice to seep in.

Lunchtime over; the holidaymakers made their way to the tents for the afternoon siesta. They would emerge dreamily, to find the teapot ready and trays of scones and jam. Waves topped off with foam as white as a horse’s mane would rush up in greeting and the moonbeams would pick out the silver in the sand. Night-birds

would announce their presence from the shadows and fireflies would flit, their jade green misty lights pulsing on and off.

Here Elspet would celebrate her first birthday. There would be balloons and cake with a candle to blow and she would empty the case of little gifts she had brought along for all the children. Hers was an absorbing trio. She watched them as their breathing deepened and became regular, eventually emerging as soft little snores. Helen and Mary could do with an hour or two of schooling every day, she sighed, as she lay back. Being a mother and a teacher, all rolled into one, made for a hectic schedule. Surely, children back home were starting school by eighteen months.

RAM KRISHNA BISWAS

The train drew up outside the soot-encrusted railway junction at Laksham. It was 2 a.m. Ram Krishna jumped down and walked rapidly past the first-class compartment. There was barely a soul at the station, barring the grey-faced, worried policemen who hurried to and fro. The train let out a hiss of steam and a door banged somewhere. He turned abruptly on his heel and walked back. The dull-red and heavy metal windows of Mr Craig's compartment remained as firmly shut as before. His bodyguards had the adjoining compartment to themselves and could be spied dozing or moving about sleepily.

Pundit-da stood on the footsteps of the compartment and stepped down as Ram Krishna returned. His breath floated like a web of smoke in front of his mouth. The train would not stop for long. Kali set off with long strides. The lookout who had embarked at Chittagong had pointed out the carriage. Mr Craig was quite definitely on board. Even if one window was opened just a crack ... but unless he had a clear view of the target, there was no point taking a risk and botching up the whole affair.

Picking their way over cloth bundles of all sizes and shapes that bulged from below the wooden planks and the narrow racks overhead, the boys made their way back to their seats again. Corpse-like figures shrouded in sheets had stretched out, occupying the space that had been vacated. Ram Krishna picked

up an unattended bundle and wedged himself in its place. The stationmaster had blown his whistle. They would have to take a call again at Chandpur at 4 a.m. in the morning. Mr Craig would have to be attacked as he made his way to the steamer. The only problem was that the whites used a route on which Indians were not permitted. A muscular Anglo-Indian inspector made an appearance which resulted in many a helpful advice and vigorous tugging of bundles. The shutters were pulled down against the all-pervading soot that clung to faces and hands and crawled up nostrils and ears. Their last resort would be at Gwaland when the passengers made their way on foot to catch the train again ... there it would be possible to get him within point-blank range, but by then the afternoon sun would be against them.

The boys jumped off as the train slowed down.

‘Hindu pani!’ the vendors selling drinking water for the Hindus called out.

‘Mussalman pani ... Mussalman pani.’

Drinking water for the Hindus came in little disposable earthenware pots but the Muslim vendors preferred to use glasses instead.

Vendors walked down the platform with baskets on their heads. ‘Cha Cha!’ Chandpur station was bright with electric lights.

The boys darted behind the pillars, sticking to the shadows. Their revolvers were tucked in securely at the waist and their woollen jumpers pulled down low. Ram Krishna shivered slightly as he fixed his gaze on Craig’s compartment. The door was opening. Both boys drew their revolvers and kept their fingers on the ready.

A man stepped out. He was by himself and he began walking rapidly away. Though he was bundled against the cold in a heavy overcoat, collars turned up at the neck, a long woollen nightcap still on his head, there was no mistaking the unusually tall figure of Mr Craig, the inspector general of police who had succeeded Mr Lowman.

Ram Krishna and Pundit-da ran behind him, stepping lightly without giving themselves away. The revolvers fired at point-blank range and the man was thrown on to the ground. The two revolutionaries did not change their pace. They continued running at full speed past the dying man. He was amidst the throes of death.

‘O Ma-go ...’

The chilling cry came to their ears. What was this? Where was Craig?

ANANTA LAL SINGH, 1 DECEMBER 1930

It was difficult concentrating on the proceedings that Monday morning. News had been pouring in ... the whisperings amongst the police and the jail authorities.

‘They were at Rameshwar’s¹⁰ yesterday afternoon. I saw them get into the taxi and leave for Kumira.’ Ardhendu whispered as soon as he got in.

News came in: Mr Craig’s body-double, Inspector Tarini Mukherji, had been shot dead at Chandpur railway station by two unknown assailants in the early hours of the morning. By midday it was confirmed that two armed youths had been caught as they walked down the Trunk Road. They had army revolvers on their persons.

It took no guessing as to who the youths were. Overcome by depression at their failure, the boys had neglected to save themselves.

DOROTHY YOUNIE

Much had happened during the vacation. The Chittagong uprising had fired the imagination of the youth all over Bengal. A group called the Bengal Volunteers had sent three youths identified as Benoy, Badal and Dinesh on their next assignment. On 8 December 1930, three armed youths dressed in suits, ties and boots presented the peon at the Writers Building at Dalhousie Square,¹¹ Calcutta, with a card and having gained entry, had run down the corridor firing shots into every room. Colonel Norman Skinner Simpson, IG prisons, had been shot dead

as he worked at his desk. He was a medical man, a retired IMS officer who had taken up service once again and dedicated himself to the betterment of prison conditions. He was, at the time, engrossed in researching the causes for hookworm infestation among prisoners.¹² Judicial Secretary J.W. Nelson and Mr Taynam were wounded but Home Secretary Albion Mar had escaped while Mr Johnson, the missionary priest, had succeeded in climbing down a drainpipe. Mr Craig, the IG police, Mr Ford and Additional IG Police Jones all rushed to the spot and had been joined by Sir Charles Tegart and Mr Bart. A corridor battle had ensued and when the revolutionaries were down to their last two bullets, they had run into a room and locked the door. Then they had consumed their cyanide pills. Benoy and Dinesh had used up their last bullets by firing at their own foreheads. The vernacular papers, the Amrita Bazaar Patrika, had identified Sudhir Gupta alias Badal, whose uncles – Nagendranath Gupta and Dharani Gupta – had been sentenced in the Muraripukur Bomb Case, as the Simpson murderer. He had been found dead at the site and had been cremated at Nimtala. Benoy and Dinesh had been rushed to Calcutta Medical College and had had their stomachs pumped. Unbroken cyanide capsules had been removed. But Benoy had succumbed the next day without regaining consciousness. He was the much wanted fourth-year medical student of the Dacca Mitford Medical School – the assassin of Mr Lowman. The lone survivor was Dinesh Gupta.¹³ He would be sent up for trial and the eventual hanging, guessed Dorothy.

Colonel Simpson's murder had come on the heels of the first attempt at terrorism in the capital, where Lord Willingdon's appointment as Lord Irwin's successor was receiving a lot of attention. He was the former aide-de-camp to the governor of Victoria in Australia, governor of Bombay from 1913 to 1919, governor of Madras from 1919 to 1924, Governor General of Canada since 1926. Known to be a hardliner, he would be moving in from Ottawa the following April. A number of Europeans had had a narrow escape on 3 December in Chandni Chowk when a bomb thrown by an unknown Indian exploded near them.¹⁴

The courts had closed for Christmas. The days were passing swiftly as is the way with holidays. Christmas week in Chittagong was a highly organized affair for the large European community. The Xmas committee had organized, like every year, an extensive programme at the club: a party and a Christmas tree for the children; tennis, golf, badminton, billiards and golf tournaments for the grownups; a couple of dances and the inevitable dinners. Stuffed with food, surfeited with crackers, Helen and Mary romped the lawns with the rest of the children until a cry caught their notice. Every child was staring in wonder at the

roof.

‘Look, Elspet, look.’ Dorothy pointed to the man in the red suit.

Santa Claus descended from the roof with a great big sack slung over his shoulder, as surprised as anybody else to discover in it an alluring package for every expectant youngster including Elspet.

‘Dolls, Noah’s arks, tea sets, building blocks ...,’ Dorothy exclaimed over each one, pretending to be surprised by the spoils. She had spent hours deciding on them before placing the orders. The parcels that had made their way from home had only increased the excitement.

‘When will Santa be back again, Daddy?’ That the magic never ceased despite the Christmases past was magical in itself.

‘You have every reason to wish Santa Claus a speedy return, don’t you?’ he laughed.

A member of the committee was calling for attention: the last event for the week was to be announced – the gymkhana for the grown-ups on New Year’s Day afternoon and the ladies special!

‘The ladies will participate in a specially invented rag game – the chicken hunt. A number of chickens will be placed in a basket, each with a coloured ribbon tied to its leg. Every lady here will be allotted a ribbon and when the basket is opened, you will have to pursue and capture your individual bird.’ His words were greeted by peals of laughter and he held up his hand for attention. ‘Practise well, my dear ladies, for you all know the Indian mourghee and are aware of how long and arduous the chase may be.’

It was all very frivolous but it was good to take the mind off the serious side of life for a while.

SEVEN

ANANTA LAL SINGH

‘On the morning of 24 of April I saw Amarendra Nandi with a pistol in both hands inside the empty house of J.M. Sengupta on Sadarghat Road. I ran to the Sadarghat beat house and informed Mr McDonald who went to the Kotwali police station to inform the superintendent of police.’

A derisive clapping of hands erupted from the dock.

‘What a brave man is this Constable Chandra Kumar De,’ laughed Ananta. ‘The sight of Amarendra sitting all by himself in an empty building within the school compound, waving both his pistols for all the world to see, sent him hotfoot to his superior officer.’

‘News that drove Johnson into panic,’ added Lokenath.

To the boys in the dock, the situation was comical. The armed police had been rushed in to block all the exit routes while Mr Shooter and Mr Lewis approached with their men from the northern and southern ends of Sadarghat Road. Major Baker had approached with his men, making his way past Ganesh’s shop, blocking off the eastern and western exits. Captain Taitt and Captain Robinson had positioned themselves on Alkaran Road 500 yards away, leaving the coast clear for Mr Farmer and Mr Johnson to lead their teams in person.

‘With an armed force, I searched the house but found nobody there. In a small room on the ground floor, however, a khaki tunic, a dhuti, a bed sheet and a broad green belt were discovered. The neighbourhood and other houses were searched ...’ Mr Younie was busy scribbling his notes as Mr Johnson narrated the events. ‘Eventually, Amarendra was found hiding in a culvert, a short distance off Alkaran Road. He was called to surrender but the only response was the report of a pistol – a shot fired from inside the culvert. The culvert was eventually broken open and Amarendra Nandi was brought out, mortally

wounded. He had a revolver in one hand and a small automatic pistol in the other.'

Ananta rose to his feet. 'Mr Johnson, do you not consider this to be sheer discredit on your part that you completely failed to stop this armed upsurge?'

'I did my duty.'

'I see. And you did your duty after you received a kick?'

'Question disallowed.' Mr Younie intervened.

'If that pleases Your Honour, why most certainly. Well, Mr Johnson, tell me now, why did you fire two shots at the culvert?'

'It was necessary,' said the police superintendent dryly.

'It was necessary because ... Because Amarendra fired in your direction and it was in self-defence that you fired back.'

'I heard the report of a pistol fire inside the culvert.'

'I put it to you that you definitely heard a pistol bang twice inside the culvert?'

'Maybe. Amarendra may have used his pistol twice but I remember one distinct sound.'

'Did you get any other response from inside the culvert in reply to your shouts for surrender?'

'No, no response.'

'Did you not infer that Amarendra was refusing to surrender?'

'Probably.'

'That is right. Now tell me, did you not similarly infer that he had shot himself rather than surrender?'

'I wasn't sure of his suicide.'

‘I put it to you, Mr Johnson, you were absolutely sure that Amarendra did not shoot aimlessly in the absence of any visible target. But he fired two successive shots inside the culvert to kill himself. Do you deny this?’

Mr Johnson took a while to answer. ‘Probably it was so,’ he finally admitted reluctantly.

‘Mr Johnson, I put it to you squarely that even knowing full well that Amarendra committed suicide, you fired two shots at his dead body out of nervous apprehension lest the ghost of Amarendra Nandi rise up and shoot you.’

‘The question is disallowed.’

Ananta bit his lip and pondered for a moment. ‘If Your Honour has objections to my suggestion that Mr Johnson feared being shot by the ghost of Amarendra Nandi, may I put my next question? Well Mr Johnson, if it was not the ghost that you feared, was it your intention to punish the corpse of Amarendra?’

‘Question disallowed.’

‘Very well, Your Honour.’ Ananta bowed his head dramatically. Since January the case had been moved to the courthouse on Fairy Hill and the viewing gallery had been packed to utmost capacity. The inside information was that Amarendra and Diptimedha had returned to the hills to find the group gone. They had then gone back to Diptimedha’s home, but preferring to be present in the city, Amarendra had spent the night in someone’s cowshed. In the morning, realizing that he had been spotted, he had taken off, scaled the walls of the Jatra Mohan School and taken refuge in the empty building. But he had been followed and the traitor had informed the police. Constable Chandra Kumar De had presented a doctored version.

KALPANA DUTT

The need for secrecy was paramount. Kalpana sat on a bench in the Ladies Park; she desperately needed a breath of fresh air. Nibaran had been gone a whole week. He should have had sent word by now. Kalpana prayed that the boy and

the bottles he carried had reached their destination safely. The acid was in its most concentrated form and came in glass bottles ... one slip and the whole show would go up in smoke

‘Kalpana!’

It was Putu-di. She was wearing sheedur in the parting of her hair. Kalpana jumped up to clasp her hands tenderly. The fingernails were broken and uneven. She shuddered involuntarily. So what they had said was true – that needles had been pushed under the nails. They had first met each other when Putu-di, a senior alumna of Bethune College, had come to attend the College Day function. Kalpana had been certain that the tall, distinguished figure would turn out to be a politician. She had later learnt that Putu-di was the sister of Nripen Banerjee, the vice principal of Chittagong Government College. But it was only during her last visit home that she had discovered that it had been Putu-di who had looked after the Chittagong revolutionaries in Chandannagar.

‘Putu-di, when did you get married?’

‘Did you not know that I got married? Or do you also think that police brutality has driven me out of my mind?’

Taken aback by the sarcasm, Kalpana mumbled an apology.¹ This was the same person who had comforted her in that first year when she was still dealing with homesickness.

‘Here.’ Putu-di handed over an envelope. ‘This is for Ganesh Ghosh.’

Kalpana’s thoughts returned to her issues. Where in Kolkata, could one hoard such a stash? But sitting and waiting endlessly was becoming equally risky. She would have to cart them herself.

That night she set about packing her trunk. On a thick layer of clothes the bottles were made to stand upright with the rest of her clothes wedged tightly around them. They would be fine, unless some fool of a coolie was careless. She sent a telegram home: CLASSES TO END ON 17 JAN 1931, WILL BOARD TRAIN SAME EVENING.

The family servants and car waited at the Chattogram station. The Rai Bahadur’s granddaughter had come home.

Waiting for her in her room was a fat envelope. Kalpana was surprised to find in it detailed instructions on the making of guncotton. All of Chattogram had been turned into one massive cantonment. Where could one possibly store eighty pounds of nitric acid but in one of the little used rooms of Rai Bahadur Durgadas Duttagupta's² mansion tucked away behind the curtains? Speed was of utmost importance, urged Ganesh-da. Experiments would have to be conducted on small amounts several times first ... Kalpana, the chemistry student, was quick to catch on.

The dangers of working with concentrated acids were all too well known. Winding several layers of muslin around her head and neck, she put on a pair of spectacles and pulled on some heavy rubber gloves. A shallow glass vessel was set on a bed of ice and in this she poured equal amounts of nitric and sulphuric acid, taking care not to splash or spill. Carefully using tongs, she soaked a ball of cotton wool for a few minutes. The trick, Ganesh-da had said, was in the washing that followed. Removing the cotton with the tongs, she soaked it in a beaker of distilled water. The washing procedure was continued until the strip of litmus paper indicated that all the acid had gone. Then wringing the cotton ball out, she set it to dry on a glass Petri dish. Lastly the final test: the application of a match and the ball of cotton should disappear in a single flash of flame.

Hers turned out a damp squib.

'Oh!' she explained airily to her bewildered mother who had stumbled upon her. 'A part of the assignments that I have to complete before I return to college.'

She would repeat the procedure again and again. 'It is all in the washing,' she murmured to herself. It was going to occupy her days and her nights.

PREMLATA

The two homes, Kali Kinkar's and his kaka Nishi Chandra De's³ had been turned in to factories. All day his father and his kaka sat, with cloth wrapped tightly about their faces, hammering away at a pile of coal that occupied the centre of the courtyard. In the corner, under the jujube tree, whose tart red fruit was prized

by the women, stood Premlata with her mother-in-law. They took turns at dropping the heavy pestle at a rhythmic pace into the mortar, pounding the pieces into dust. Kali's kakima sat on one side, a winnowing mat jumping up and down expertly in her hands. The heap of coal dust bounced up and down until the fine dust lay at one end, separated from the tiny coarse particles that were returned to the mortar once again. The years of pounding and sieving of rice stood them now in good stead. The air in the courtyard had not cleared in weeks and a grey-black haze hung over it, settling on the walls, creeping through the cracks in the doors and windows, clinging tenaciously to the bedclothes, the utensils and into the carefully covered pots of cooked rice.

Bags of yellow gandhak, sulphur, and shora, saltpetre, had been brought in the night before. Kali and Shishu⁴ had stacked them along the wall within the sleeping areas. Once they had finished with the coal and charcoal they would begin on the gandhak and shora. Premlata was a quiet girl by nature and since her marriage spoke even less. The glaring gap between her new husband's educational background and her own was becoming obvious with every passing day. But there was a fount of inherent wisdom that she could draw from and she knew better than to question her husband as to who they were that came and went by night. That she could be trusted and be allowed to work with them was enough to keep her happy. Every day, she put aside a little of whatever had been cooked ... enough for an extra mouth or two.

Premlata motioned towards the well and little Bhola,⁵ who had appeared out of nowhere to help them in their labours, sprang to his feet, grateful to be let off. He drew up a pail of water, washed the soot off his hands and face and drank a deep draught. Then he pulled up a second pail and waited for her. They worked through the daylight hours and lunch was the only break they had. The elders had washed up and had come indoors. She ladled out the rice that she had mixed with salt, chillies and pungent mustard oil. There was no fish or vegetable to be had these days. The boy ate along with them. He hardly ever went home.

As she sat eating by herself, he came in with the drinking pot filled afresh. Premlata looked up at the gentle face with its plump brown cheeks and sensitive mouth. A poet's face, she mused.

'Do your parents not worry?'

He shook his head. 'Don't have any. Boro Boudi frets. I will go and see her

soon.'

ANANDA PRASAD GUPTA, 6 FEBRUARY 1931

'Motilal Nehru has passed away.' From the moment the sipahis and sergeants arrived to fit the handcuffs and fix the ropes, the words were on every lip.

The boys clambered into the dock and took their places on the benches. The courtroom buzzed with the news: the great Congress leader was dead. The gate to the dock creaked open. Lokenath-da came in.

'The proceedings have to be closed for the day.' His face was grim and determined.

Ganesh-da came in next and winked at Sahayram.

A thrill of excitement ran down the dock. Ananta-da breezed in. It was a Friday and if they could pull it off there would be no hearings until the following Monday.

The tribunal members took their seat. Mr Younie was a stickler for punctuality. The court clerk placed a sheaf of papers before them and the first witness for the day was brought in.

The public prosecutor cleared his throat. But Ganesh-da interrupted him.

'Your Honour, we have a request. Mr Motilal Nehru has passed away. We request the proceedings be closed in his honour.'

Mr Younie was not about to entertain any such foolish notion. It was plain as daylight that the attempt at honouring an ahimsavadi leader was an endeavour to disrupt a normal working day.

'There is no such precedent. The request is denied,' he said curtly and turned to the public prosecutor. 'Please proceed.'

Khan Bahadur Abdul Sattar prepared to begin again when Lokenath-da raised his voice. ‘Your Honour, we insist that the court be closed today. We are about to begin a memorial service and request everybody present to join us.’

‘This is absurd. This is a court. You must realize your position ... you are on trial. I warn you – do not disturb the court. Khan Bahadur, please proceed.’

The glove had been flung into the ring. The dock erupted with cries.

‘Normal proceedings must stop. We must commemorate the death of our national leader.’

‘I order you to stop.’

The judge was sounding menacingly calm. He seems to be losing his patience rather quickly today, thought Ananda. ‘No, you withdraw your order.’ He lent his voice to the chorus from the dock. ‘You have no right to order us. You cannot gag us.’

‘Mr Shooter.’ Mr Younie thundered.

Mr Shooter made ready to unlock the door of the dock.

‘Sahayram!’ Ganesh-da called out.

Sahayram’s voice filled the courtroom. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay’s ‘Bande Mataram’ set to Desh Raag by Rabindranath Tagore was a powerful composition. The accused in the dock all rose to their feet as did the audience in the gallery and some members of the press. The tribunal members dithered, looking at Mr Younie for a cue. The national song was being sung. The disorder in the courtroom had been silenced in a stroke.

Mr Younie stood up reluctantly. The sahib’s eyes had narrowed to slits. He cast a contemptuous glance at the dock and strode out – a tall lean figure flanked by his two diminutive companions.

A diplomatic victory had been won that day.

DOROTHY YOUNIE

‘How long since you last wrote home?’

John peered over the top of his newspaper. ‘Been overworking my deputy, have I?’ He smiled and put down the paper. Breakfast was about the only time they could snatch a few moments together. ‘You realize it is not entirely preoccupation, nor laziness which, as you may ...’

‘Well be inclined to believe ... yes?’ Dorothy completed his sentence for him.

Wagging his finger with as much gravity as he could muster, John continued, ‘It is ummm ... modesty that leads me to retire in your favour. You are far more satisfying a scribe than I ever will be!’

‘Well, I grant it to you; I am good at filling in the domestic side of the picture. When do you see this thing ending, by the way?’

John heaved a sigh. ‘Lucky if we can finish it by the end of May. Ummm ... why not ask the pater out to India? Mrs Ramsbotham has been having a visit from her father ... forty years in India, been retired for twenty and has made the voyage at the age of eighty-two. A pretty stout effort?’ He returned to his paper. ‘Rioting in Benares⁶ ... looks serious ... provoked by the picketing of a Muslim’s cloth shop.’

‘They hate us but they hate each other more.’

‘It’s this Bombay scoundrel⁷ and his Satia Graha (sic) movement. Passive resistance for the intelligentsia is interpreted in much the same way as the Dissenters did during the Education Bill troubles in England but ...’ he shook his head sorrowfully. ‘... the intelligentsia in India comprises an infinitesimal percentage of the population and when irresponsible British-hating criminals like Gandhi start preaching Satia Graha (sic) to the mob, trouble with a very big ‘T’ is bound to arise! For the seething proletariat, passive resistance means open anarchy.’

‘Soul force!’ sighed Dorothy. ‘The Indians are unable to grasp the concept of the weapon. Sadly, they are too well acquainted with the meaning of brute force.’

‘And the lathi, the brick bat and the broken bottle, not to mention matches, kerosene oil and straw.’ John leant across to plant a kiss on the top of her head before leaving. ‘And Ramsay McDonald hopes to have a Congress representative at the next Round Table Conference!’

Cloth, pondered Dorothy ... it was more than that ... a complicated issue. The War had increased the price of cloth and salt, goods that came all the way across the seas from Manchester and Liverpool. But what meaning had the war for the common man? How could he be made to understand why he should pay three times as much for his salt and for his dhuti? A little newspaper report that had caught her eye shortly after the raid had niggled at her since:

QUEEN GIVES LEAD:

8

Only British goods

‘I like it but I will not have it because it is not British,’ said the Queen to a Windsor shopkeeper when shown an article of foreign manufacture during her Easter shopping. Both the Queen and Princess Mary insisted that every article bought should be British.

Was Mr Gandhi so wrong in insisting that Indians buy only Indian goods? But the trouble had really begun with the War and the sad truth was that though it had been over for more than ten years, the post-war depression held the world in a vice-like grip. But when it came to the peasantry in India, depression translated itself into a life and death situation, giving Mr Gandhi the much needed ammunition.

John had written a long letter on the subject at the time.⁹ He had explained how despite the great harvest in 1917, jute couldn’t be exported, for the dealers weren’t buying and the raiyats – the peasantry – were left with useless stuff on

their hands. The rice crop had been exceptionally good as well that year, which meant that the prices fell once again. Then the cold weather came and the demand for cloth went up, as was expected. It had resulted in looting at the haats. It had been his first year in India and he had had the rather jolly task, as a sort of cavalry patrol, of nipping the epidemic in the bud: riding out to the haats, gauging the mood, explaining that the prices had gone up not due to the rapacity of the shopkeepers but because of the War. How did one explain to a villager, who lived 3,000 miles from the sea and had never laid eyes upon the sea or a soldier for that matter, the working of the economic principles which had raised the price of his dhuti from two rupees to four? Who could really blame the villager if he took the short cut, threw down two rupees to the cloth-wallah and made off with a dhuti ... but of course it had all the makings of a first-class riot. And it was John who had the enviable task of telling them they'd got to like it or lump it; that this was the way of war; and getting them in return to assure him that they would not create any golmal, for was not the king emperor's happiness their happiness and the king's adversity theirs also?

The War, mused Dorothy, had left not a single life untouched. John had sailed out for India the day after his brother Jimmy had been posted 'missing' in France and had set foot in India a month later, on 5 December 1916. The ICS served for seven to ten years before being allocated to other branches of the service – executive, judicial or otherwise – and he had spent the first two years as assistant collector, training under a collector. British India comprised then of eight provinces and Bengal of twenty-five districts which were administered by five commissioners.

His first posting had taken him to Rajshahi and he had been captivated with the smooth, azure Ganges, five minutes away from the residence. It is magnificent, he would say, watching the sun dip behind the horizon, leaving the smooth face of Mother Ganges aquiver with an ineffable golden radiance. The jails, he had found packed, with an ugly lot of blighters; the vivid green of the countryside, its freshness and delicacy, impossible to describe even with the aid of a camera; the punkahwallahs – little boys who remained out of sight, stirring the air during the day while he liberally handed out small fines and short spells of koyed¹⁰ – replaced by grown men by night as the chhokras were bound to fall asleep; that the cakes of sticky resinous hemp flowers, like whisky at home, attracted a heavy duty and had to perforce be stored in government warehouses. Soon he had become a trooper at the Calcutta Light Horse Club and had expected to be sent off to the North-west Frontier as a member of the Indian Army Reserve of

officers so that existing regiments could be diverted for War.

But before that could happen, he had found himself taking long rides on his horse, following the sub-divisional officer from village to village, explaining the details of the War Loan Stock. It was similar to the one being issued at home. The smallest cultivator could buy a seven-rupee post office certificate and get back ten rupees in five years.¹¹ The larger issues were to attract the more well-to-do. The challenge had been to fight the invincible ignorance and raise the £100,000,000 that India was to contribute. A year later he had found himself at Serampore, still raising the War Loan. His Bengali and Hindustani had improved considerably by then and he had become quite a tub-thumper while delivering one of his stump speeches pointing out to the rich and poor their duty in the matter. It was an uphill task, he had said, convincing the babus that Bengal's battles were being fought in France and that it was their duty, apart from the fact that they would get an excellent return on their money, to subscribe to the Second Indian Loan.

It was the War then. Dorothy ran a thoughtful hand over her abdomen. And it is the War now. The War is still to blame, she said to herself, looking out at the kitchen garden. End of May ... John had said. It would be relief to get to Kalimpong. The mali was approaching with a little diffidence, two simple mud pots slung from either hand. He squatted on the ground, placing the pots before her. Dorothy peered into the glistening brown interiors, the fragrance emanating in gentle wisps.

'Ooh! Date palm syrup! Thank you, thank you, I love it and so do the children.'

The man still waited expectantly.

'The sahib loves it in his coffee.'

There was a gracious acceptance of the thanks and the mali took his leave.

ANANTA LAL SINGH

'I have seen them smuggle in bombs wrapped in coconut coir!' The hysterical

voice was coming from the direction of the jail office.

‘What has happened?’ Ananta was being removed from his cell. He looked upset that the calm of the morning had been shattered.

‘Babu, one of your boys, the last confessor, has beaten up a convict overseer.’

‘Lal Mohan? Why?’

The sipahi shrugged his shoulders. ‘Why, babu, that is the question? The overseer was beating up another convict ... nothing to do with your people and your man lashed out and hit him.’

Ananta let out a sigh of comprehension. And now the fellow was throwing a tantrum. He was swearing Lal Mohan had hidden bombs in the pile of coconut coir used by the ordinary convict to make rope. He glanced at the floor of the ante-cell – the tightly beaten-down earth, studded with pebbles and chips of stone. There were no bombs in the coconut coir heap and nor was Lal Mohan involved in anything sinister.

‘Gurudev Rabindranath has rushed back to Shantiniketan.’ Ardhendu and the others out on bail had brought in the story. ‘A sanyasi had literally materialized,’ Ardhendu rolled his eyes, ‘camped out under a tree since December last, trying to incite the students to violence.’

‘I thought Gurudev had given strict instructions that Shantiniketan was to be kept away from all forms of revolutionary activities?’

‘When Gandhi-ji had asked Gurudev to teach his students to spin, Gurudev had said that poetry he could spin and perhaps a few songs, but of Gandhi-ji’s cotton he was sure to make a mess.’ Ganesh was finding it difficult to pay attention to the witness in the stand. It made the youngsters giggle. They had crowded around those out on bail, for they were the ones that had access to newspapers. The youngsters were finding the story irresistible. ‘And Dorothy Elmhirst’s¹² visit last February prodded Jackers to add an annual grant ...’

‘So to get back to the story ...’ Ardhendu drew the attention back to himself. ‘Calcutta University decided to honour Sir Stanley Jackson with a degree in law. The convocation was held on 28 February. A mushaira was being performed and everyone was enormously bored when a pretty young widow called Parvati

walked up to the platform. She was shy and Sir Stanley tried to coax her to come forward. She slipped her hand into her sari, as if to take out her poem and pulled out a revolver instead. The rector, Lieutenant Colonel Suhrawardy,¹³ took a flying leap and managed to grab her hand and the bullet hit the roof. She was caught and a young pale-faced man called Shantilal came up and surrendered willingly, handing over a second revolver.'

A couple of eyebrows had shot up. It sounded like a flippant adventure ... Gurudev's students trying to bump off Jackers.

'They say it should earn the colonel a knighthood. Gurudev has rushed down ... they say he is keeping unwell these days ... and sent his errant students packing. Several have been dismissed. The teachers have been chastised and sent back to their classrooms. Of course, the sadhu has disappeared just as mysteriously.'

For some days now, Ganesh, Lokenath and he had handed over the charge of their defence to the team of defence lawyers. Case and conspiracy – the combination had become too much to handle. Ananta looked around the courtroom. The white sergeants stood around. Mr Shooter and Mr Lewis were noticeable by their absence. So the jail authorities had involved the police.

'Babu,' the sipahi on guard that night whispered. 'The entire jail was searched. All the burra sahibs came, even Colonel Dallas Smith. They have removed all the piles of coir and Mr Johnson even slid the tip of his knife into the floor here and there.'

KUNDAPRABHA

Kunda had slipped in the thala of rice and two pots: one empty and one filled with fresh water. Leaving the door unlocked to allow the man a chance to stretch his legs, she crept back into bed.

'The man will have to go.'

Her mother was lying wide awake. Kunda was startled. How long had she known and why had she waited this long to say so?

‘But where will he go?’

‘That is none of our concern. You will go now and tell him. He has to leave immediately,’ she hissed.

‘Ma!’ Kunda whispered in protest. Her father had not stirred. ‘It’s raining. How can you turn him out like this?’

‘Go and tell him now.’

Kunda ran out and burst into the little room, her eyes wide and distraught. ‘She knows. She insists you leave now. Where will you go?’

The man appeared not to be surprised. ‘I will be all right.’ He picked up his umbrella and his little bundle. ‘But I want you to promise me something. Write to me; every little piece of news you can lay your hands on. Address it to Zamindar and hand the letter over to Dulal.’ He rested his hand briefly on the top of her head and walked out into the night.

She ran behind him. ‘You’ll be careful, won’t you? The Sripur police station is just down this road.’

ANANTA LAL SINGH, MONDAY, 9 MARCH 1931

‘Sarojini Naidu has called it the meeting of the two mahatmas ... the eight meetings have lasted over twenty-four hours and Gandhi-ji is impressed by Irwin’s sincerity.’ The boys on bail were bubbling with news. The proceedings in the court had taken a back seat as the whispering continued in the dock. The Gandhi–Irwin Pact signed on 5 March 1931 was big news. Since Friday, it had generated many discussions in the newspapers, and political leaders had begun addressing the masses, discussing the pros and cons. The undertrials had had to wait until Monday for the news.

‘They say that Prime Minister Ramsay McDonald and Secretary of State Benn are eager for peace, if it can be had without weakening the Labour Party’s position. But the Tories are furious and Mr Churchill has gone on record

describing the meetings as ...’ Madhu Guha pulled a comic face as he recited the lines he had memorized. ‘... a nauseating humiliating spectacle of this one-time Inner Temple lawyer, now seditious fakir, striding half-naked up the steps of the viceroy’s palace to negotiate and parley on equal terms with the representative of the King Emperor.’

‘Irwin lets him out of jail and leads Gandhi-ji up the garden path.’ Ganesh sounded out of sorts. ‘What has been decided on?’

‘Gandhi-ji has put forward five demands in exchange for the discontinuation of the civil disobedience movement by the Indian National Congress.’ Madhu counted them off on his fingers:

Participation by the Indian National Congress in the Round Table Conference,

Withdrawal of all ordinances issued by the British government imposing curbs on the activities of the Indian National Congress,

Withdrawal of all prosecutions relating to several types of offences except those involving violence,

Release of prisoners arrested for participating in the civil disobedience movement,

The removal of tax on salt, which allowed the Indians who live near the sea to produce salt for their own private use.

‘And clean forgot to put in a word for Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev!’ Ganesh and Ananta exchanged knowing looks.¹⁴

‘And the Bengal detenues ... no one remembers them.’ Lokenath said bitterly.

‘Progress?’ Ananta whispered to Ardhendu aside.

He dropped his eyelids slowly. Ananta was satisfied. ‘Get tin canisters ready ... small – should hold about two to four ounces ... we need half a mon.’

‘Mr J.M. Sengupta addressed the All Bengal Students’ Conference yesterday.’ Madhu continued. ‘He urged everyone to read the document released carefully. He reiterated time and again that he spoke for himself and not on behalf of Gandhi-ji, the Congress, or the Working Committee. He calls the pact a truce. It must not be confused for a declaration of peace, for there can be no peace in India unless every young man is released from prison. He said that he urged Gandhi-ji personally to negotiate the release of those convicted for violent crimes but sadly it proved impossible. He believes if we strengthen Gandhi-ji’s cause we should all be out of jail within weeks, for the 500 or so in the jails right now, are according to him, all staunch Congressmen.’¹⁵

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‘Gyan Babu,’ Ananta began. He was wearing his most soulful look, ‘I don’t feel quite right.’ He was planning on asking for an hour in the fresh air that evening after court.

‘Enough.’ Gyan Babu snapped.

Ananta’s expression registered only wounded virtue. He retreated into the interiors of the van.

The mood in the courtroom seemed no better. Then a whisper caught his ear: Detective Inspector Sashank Bhattacharya had been found shot through the lung, by the side of a straw heap in Barma village.

‘Yesterday afternoon ...’ Ardhendu dropped his voice. He had moved to the corner where Ananta, Ganesh and Lokenath sat. ‘There was a meeting at Kanungo-para. Phutu-da and Biren De were in a hurry to leave.’

‘Why in the daylight hours?’ The trio was instantly upset. Hundreds of white-clothed policemen had been employed and vigilance heightened; from the ordinary constable to the relatives of the senior officers, everyone seemed to be on the track of the revolutionaries these days.

Ardhendu shrugged. ‘Anyway they checked each street before entering. One

villager was spotted a couple of times.'

Ignoring the moans of dismay, Ardhendu continued. 'Phutu-da sidestepped into a side lane and peeped out. The man had increased his pace. Phutu-da stepped out suddenly and the man slowed down. But by then Phutu-da had recognized him.'

'Wouldn't have been easy for him to take on both of them together.' Lokenath observed.

'Phutu-da and Biren ran in opposite directions down a forked road. Phutu-da went round a house and hid behind a pile of straw. He could see the inspector deliberate at the fork, slap his forehead and then choose the path that led towards him.'

'Phutu still cannot use a revolver with one hand. He has to use both his hands ever since the burn injury,' said Ananta. 'The army revolvers are far too heavy for him. Master-da will have to move to a new place.'

A sudden crash brought everyone to their feet. Ranadhir had fallen off the bench. The boys rushed to help but the deadweight was impossible to manage.

'Some water please.' Ganesh called to the sergeants. Ranadhir's father and the defence lawyer came rushing up to the dock.

Mr Shooter opened the gate and walked in with his men. They helped Ganesh carry him out. Manoeuvring between the benches was difficult and the boys nearer the gate stepped out thoughtfully. Ranadhir's distraught father was by his side while his mother wept silently in the audience gallery. There were a few anxious moments before the boy regained consciousness.

'Take them back, Mr Shooter.' Mr Younie had risen to his feet. 'Let them rest.'

Ananta and Lokenath waited for Ganesh to return back to the dock. They would be the last to leave.

They were tight-lipped in their congratulations. Tuesday 17 March 1931 was another day that was going their way.

BIREN DE

Even though dusk had set in, the village haat remained crowded. It was market day. Outside a shop, close to the dirt track, sat a group of men engrossed in an animated conversation. They fell silent as a youth gave in to popular demand and raised his voice:

Our mother's eyes are filled with tears

Her voice is broken and sad

A thousand wrongs have been heaped on her head

She calls, 'Which son of mine will fight for a mother's honour?'

Those in front slink back in fright and fear

A noble youth pushes his way forward

He throws out his chest and answers in a ringing voice

I will give my life for my motherland!

The youth's voice rose and fell with dramatic intonations. He was reciting from 'Bandi Mata' – Mother in chains. Ganesh Ghosh's verses had found their way to every lip.

Those early hours before daybreak are filled with sweetness

The hangman comes and knocks: Come with me to the gallows

The prisoner is heavy with sleep – dreaming of a hero's noble mission

He asks: 'Who are you – so kind so merciful?'

She answers: 'I am death. Your time has come. I have come to take
you away.'

Biren drew his chador about himself covering his nose and mouth as if against the dust. The youth was being praised for his oratory skills. The rest resumed their discussion.

'... the murder at Barma village!'

The words came to his ears.

'Ma save us.' The speaker held his ears. 'It's Surjya Sen's group ... they will not spare you if they think you are spying on them. Thank God, the Sripur village police beat is at hand ... we are safe.'

Biren did not stop to listen. As he made his way, he was conscious of a figure slinking in and out of the bends on the little lane. Soon, a second had joined the first and when he took the turn on the road a hefty youth confronted him.

'Who are you? What is your business?'

Biren whispered in code. The youth went into a house nearby and then signalled for him to enter. Master-da was ready and waiting.

'Come,' said Biren and led him by the hand out into the darkening twilight. They walked rapidly through the village streets, their chadors draped over their heads. Soon, the last of the houses had been left far behind. The land stretched for miles, flat and empty except for the stubble that had been left over from the recent harvesting.

KUNDAPRABHA

The rain lay where it fell, converting large sections of the fields into lakes. There was no moonlight to show the way but Mani-da moved, as sure-footed as a goat, never relinquishing his hold on Kunda's hand. The roads in these low-lying areas had all been turned into rivers of liquid mud and it wouldn't be long before they would be making the use of boats to traverse the area.

'Walk slowly, Mani-da,' said Kunda as she slipped for the second time in the slush. 'You are a night owl but I am new to this.'

Beyond the fields, the land sloped gently upwards, forming a low rise of hills. The two climbed up to where a tattered palm leaf hut stood forlorn and abandoned. The farmers that used it to guard the standing crop would not return for several months now.

Mahendra, or Mani-da as Kunda knew him, pushed the door open. The soft glow of an oil lamp lit the face of the dark-skinned goddess. Beside the little statue with its scarlet tongue sat a man. It was his eyes that held her attention. This was the man she had looked after.

'This is Master-da,' Mahendra whispered to her. Kunda folded her hands and bowed her head. When in the presence of the mother goddess she could not touch another mortal's feet.

'I am Kunda, Master-da.'

'Why have you come?'

Her eyes were adjusting to the light in the room. There were several others in there, sitting and watching her quietly. A delicious thrill ran through her body. It was as if she had entered a dacoit's den.

'I wanted to meet you.'

'And how will it help?'

'I want to follow your ideals ... help free the country ... you will teach me how.'

Master-da reached out to take her hand. He held it in a crushing grip. 'This won't do,' he said. 'You have to be stronger. Dedicate yourself to Ma. Promise her here and now that you will never let her down.'

Kunda sank to her knees and laid her head on the floor.

After a minute, Master-da spoke again. 'There are exercise sessions being held.' He was speaking to Mani-da. 'Make her attend ... also lathi wielding and the dagger, running, jumping, climbing trees.'

'Why do you write "debota" in the address line of your letters?' Master-da's eyes were fixed on her once more.

'Because you have sacrificed everything for the country.'

'That does not make anyone a god. Watch out for human weaknesses. When I send you the letter you must come. Promise me that you will never hide anything from me.'

'I promise.'

'Her name will be Kobi from now on.' Master-da addressed the gathering.

Kunda went to join the four women that sat together at one end of the room.

EIGHT

ANANDA PRASAD GUPTA, MONDAY, 23 MARCH 1931

Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev had been hanged.¹ It was a day that had arrived as a surprise, for the execution had taken place six days in advance. The mood remained sombre in the courtroom.

‘The Congress did not want the Karachi meet to coincide with the hanging ... this was the best way to avoid a flare up.’ Lokenath-da was quick to point out.

‘There were insiders who turned approvers – king’s witnesses, or this never would have happened.’ Ananta-da said mournfully.

‘What will happen to them now? Our countrymen will tear them apart?’ Ananda voiced the query that had dominated the hajat-ghar.

‘Oh, they probably have been whisked off to old Blighty² by now. A degree from some London University, a job, a great life, but never will they hold their heads up again.’

Ugly rumours crept in through the day. The British had not dared hold a cremation within the jail, fearing that the glow would attract the villagers. The bodies had been hurried to the banks of the Satluj by a team of white policemen. The pyres had been put out as day threatened to dawn and the partially burnt remains crudely hacked up and dumped into the river. The villagers had since then been dragging the bottom of the river for the remains. Sand and stones soaked in the blood of martyrs were being collected with reverence.³ A second funeral was to be conducted. The country was in a fragile mood.

The undertrials were noticeably quiet. The younger boys had been badly affected. Gyan Babu took his rounds, speaking gently to each one.

The hajat-ghar door creaked open. Ananta-da, Ganesh-da and Lokenath-da

walked in. 'We are to stay together from now on.'

The presence of the three worked as a balm. Gyan Babu and jailor babu looked less miserable as they left for the day. Subodh Choudhury and Phonindra Nandi would also be moved back in. The two boys had requested to be shifted out to individual cells some weeks ago, complaining of their inability to sleep, packed in like sardines with the others. But at a time like this it was good to be all together.

The hajat-ghar comprised one large room and a smaller room that could accommodate four or five people. A large compound with high walls surrounded the two rooms. Armed sentries patrolled its periphery and guarded the gates. The boys were in addition granted an hour in the open before being locked up, for after all, what had their lives been reduced to ... the four walls of the cell and the four walls of the courthouse?

The country had gone into mourning. People were fasting in protest, wearing black badges and armbands. Shops and businesses had been shut down. Jawaharlal Nehru was the first to pay his tribute: Bhagat Singh was a clean fighter who faced the enemy in an open field. Mahatma Gandhi, though profuse in his praise, was facing the brunt of open hostility. In the face of crowds waving black flags at Gandhi-ji's motorcade, the Congress attempted various explanations: Lord Irwin had promised the Mahatma that he would commute the death sentence to life imprisonment but had gone back on his word when his senior British ICS staff threatened to resign en bloc; that Lord Irwin had despatched a telegram to Lahore Central Jail to stay the hangings, but the telegram reached only after the deed was done.⁴ But the people weren't convinced that Gandhi-ji had tried enough.

DOROTHY YOUNIE

INDIAN RIOTS.

SERIOUS CLASH AT CAWNPORE

Moslem-Hindu Outbreak.

TROOPS CALLED OUT

CALCUTTA, Wednesday

Fierce fighting between the Hindus and Moslems occurred at Cawnpore yesterday, following demonstrations in connection with the execution of the three terrorists in Lahore.

Up to this morning 20 had been killed and nearly 150 injured.

The cause of the trouble appears to have been the refusal of the Moslems to participate in the mourning celebrations for the dead men, whereupon the Hindus attacked the Moslems and general rioting ensued.

On Tuesday night the Moslems attacked the Currency Office, the Courts and the Telegraph Office, smashing windows with stones, but were driven out by the police.

Throughout the night, gangs of both communities created a reign of terror, looting and setting fire to shops and burning mosques.

The police are unable to cope with the situation and fired among the rioters, but without effect. Finally the British Troops were called out, followed this morning by the Auxiliary Forces who are now patrolling the streets. All business has been suspended.

Up to noon today the brigade had dealt with 14 incendiary fires.⁵

John had flipped through the papers but the article had caught Dorothy's eye. Fighting had broken out the very next day after the hangings, curfew had been imposed upon Cawnpore and hundreds of police drafted from Lucknow and Allahabad. What John chose to comment on, instead, was an item in Lord Irwin's farewell speech on the night of 25 March at New Delhi: The safeguards

suggested had been subjected to criticism and misunderstanding and that only a shallow critic would undervalue the powerful and promising framework that the Round Table Conference had prepared.

It had been in response to London's sharp reaction denying the newspaper report of a personal telegram sent by Secretary of State Captain Wedgewood Benn to Mr Gandhi suggesting financial safeguards for the next Round Table Conference.

As the week went by, the rioting only worsened. John had left early that Saturday morning and Chrissie, in her dressing gown, joined Dorothy at the table. The girl gathered the papers, ignoring the pages that carried the unpleasant bits of news.

RIOTS AT CAWNPORE.

124 DEAD; 400 INJURED.

MANY HOUSES BURNT.

Population panic stricken.

Military and Police Patrol Streets.

Calcutta. March 28

It is officially stated that 80 Moslems and 35 Hindus were killed in the riots at Cawnpore which followed the execution of three terrorists at Lahore last week. Several women and children were among the victims. It is estimated that 400 persons were wounded. Most of them were Moslems. More than 100 houses were burnt and much property was damaged. One hundred and fifty arrests were made.

The population has become panic stricken in the last two days and 10,000

persons have fled from the city. All business has been suspended and food supplies from adjacent villages have ceased. Armoured cars and members of the Highland Light Infantry, the East Yorkshire Regiment, auxiliary forces and 1200 armed police are patrolling the streets. Requests for a declaration of martial law have been refused.

Although the situation is somewhat easier, sporadic assaults and arson continue. Hindus attacked the Moslem servants of a European firm last night and one woman was burnt to death. European police have dispersed the rioters.

The Working Committee of the All India Congress at the session at Karachi yesterday passed a resolution confirming the agreement between the viceroy (Lord Irwin) and Gandhi. It also passed resolutions reaffirming that the goal of the committee was Indian independence, demanding complete control of the army, foreign relations, finance and fiscal policy, and demanding the release of all political prisoners.

Confidence in Gandhi.

The committee passed a vote of complete confidence in Gandhi, and appointed him leader of the delegation to be sent to London by the Congress, Nau Jawan Sabha, or the Youth League, which includes Bolsheviks from the frontier wearing red coats on which appear the insignia of the hammer and the sickle and attacks the agreement between Lord Irwin and Gandhi and the policy of the Congress. It outlined a programme for adoption by the left wing. Among its plans is the intensive boycott of British goods.⁶

She had found a snippet that was more to her taste and read out aloud: 'Woman shoots man! Imprisoned for twenty years. Former Queen of Beauty. Paris. March 27. Georgette Hadot, a former queen of beauty has been sentenced to imprisonment for twenty years with hard labour for having murdered her former lover, Isaac Eichisky, a diamond broker, in June. She crept up behind him in the street, took a revolver from her handbag, and shot him.' Rolling her eyes, she glanced at Dorothy who gazed back over the top of her cup, riveted. 'As he lay dead, she calmly powdered her face. Eichisky severed relations with her in 1928 and gave her 20,000 francs, but she demanded 200,000 francs. She sent Eichisky

many newspaper cuttings showing that men and women had been acquitted of crimes of passion.'

Chrissie's presence was a healing one: young, bursting with health – fresh cheeks, very white teeth, lively eyes and above all, a simple desire to please.

BIREN DE, MARCH 1931

Deep in the hills, a group of boys were receiving instructions on how to load revolvers.

'Gudum!'

A weapon had fired. Biren lay still, his shirt a mass of blood. Someone had disregarded his admonition to keep the weapon pointed at the sky; to keep the finger off the trigger unless commanded to do otherwise. All around him was a stillness. His students had frozen. They would not know what to do unless he told them. He tried to speak. 'Shoot me. Bury me here and go.'

It brought them crowding around but his instructions were not being followed. They were intent on trying to staunch the flow of blood. They did not understand. Far greater troubles would follow.

'Shoot,' he protested weakly as he clouded over.

A great boulder seemed to be weighing down upon his chest making it impossible to draw breath.

'Biren, I am here.'

Master-da's voice was calling to him. It induced an instant calm. 'Cyanide,' he begged. There were many people around. The boys had carried him to a village.

A voice was speaking. 'I am Gagan Ghose. I will take him with me.'

The name was far from unfamiliar. Gagan Ghose was a known bandit, a

hardened criminal that worked in the region. The words brought on a hush. Would Gagan not try to claim the reward that went with the capture of Biren De?

‘I steal to support my family and suffer its consequences gladly. Maybe helping a swadeshi babu will land me in jail once again. How does it matter?’

Biren survived for nearly a week. Master-da remained constantly by his side. Tarakeshwar, Mahendra and Binod Bihari Dutt rushed in and out bringing doctors, medication and food. Gagan Ghose ensured that no one, not the police, not even the neighbours caught a whiff of what was going on in his home. But despite the care, the wound turned septic.

As Biren lay with his head on Binod’s lap, he gazed up at the others. ‘Don’t punish the boy,’ he begged.⁷

ANANDA PRASAD GUPTA

Ananda, Subodh Choudhury, Phoni, Sukhendu Dastidar, Subodh Biswas, Ranadhir, Noni Deb and Ganesh-da sat in a tight little circle, chatting quietly. Ananta-da and Lokenath-da called out instructions as the others carried out the callisthenics routine. It was their hour in the open. The guards and officers had stood around for the first week or so. The jailor had been the first to stop attending and now it was down to just the sipahis and the old jamadar. They had settled down on the ground beside the gate.

Subodh produced a screwdriver from his pocket. He was a magician when it came to handling the screwdriver. Within minutes, he had whittled away at the earth and dug up a hole, some six to seven inches wide and about eighteen to twenty inches deep. It was the work of another couple of minutes for the boys to empty out their pockets and pack the earth tightly back in place. The jamadar had himself smuggled in six bottles of methylated spirit, bags of plaster of Paris powder, coal and a spirit stove. These had been spirited under the floors of the three ante-cells and later in the one shared by Subodh Choudhury and Phoni Nandi. The earlier superficial pits had been converted into deeper pits during bath times when the sipahis politely shut the doors to the ante-cells. Tins,

containing guncotton and picric acid powder, fitted with wires were being brought in gradually. Ardhendu had painted them carefully with damp-proof paint. Ananta-da's didi had been unable to procure dynamite ... a pound would have been more than enough to blow up the jail but now half a mon of gunpowder would have to be smuggled in instead; there was enough and more, for at Kali Kinkar De's home ten mon lay ready and waiting.

Mr Bloomfield and Mr Wright, the two European warders had delivered two 0.450 bore army revolvers, a number of cartridges and a dozen sharpened daggers. By and by, Master-da and Nirmal-da had succeeded in sending revolvers, cartridges, daggers, induction coils, two dozen torch batteries, 50 gaj of insulated electric wire, a magnifying glass, twelve motor headlight bulbs, carbon di sulphuride, yellow phosphorous, many types of improvised implements like files, pliers, screwdrivers, saws that could slice through iron; a small and mobile factory had got going inside the jail. The secret had to be maintained carefully not just from the jail staff and the ordinary convicts but from the rest of the armoury raid accused as well. Subodh Roy and Sahayram were the usual lookouts who burst into song if any 'unauthorized' person came by.

The outside plan was progressing as per schedule. Ardhendu spent his nights studying the targets that had been identified. Another godown was required. Pritilata Waddadar's father had one such house in a lonely place that fitted the description. However, he would give it on rent to no one but a married couple. Robi Sen, a fresh-faced new recruit, had dressed up in a sari and, accompanied by Hriday Das, paid old Waddadar Moshai a visit.

A message had gone out via the Gita, with a third plan in place, for Ram Krishna-da and Pundit-da's appeal had not produced the desired results. Pundit-da's verdict had been scaled down to transportation for life but the decision to hang Ram Krishna-da had been upheld yet again. No one but close relatives were permitted to meet condemned men. But Ram Krishna-da's mother had taken Pritilata to meet him and introduced her to the jail authorities as her niece. Pritilata had become the link and had helped smuggle a revolver into Alipore Central Jail to help him fulfil his last wish: shoot Judge Stevens. It would help him go to the gallows in peace, he had said. But the Gita had come back with Master-da's noting: had my Sadarghat Club boys been available today, this plan of kidnapping a senior ICS and holding him to ransom for the life of Ram Krishna would have been easy. But today my resources are at a low. Master-da's

words had been read with a heavy heart. Ram Krishna-da was lost.

The bell had begun ringing wildly ... the mad bell that clanged furiously and unexpectedly announced a sudden change of guard. The boys rose lazily to their feet as the jamadar and the sipahis prepared for handing and taking over. All signs of illicit activity had been wiped away as the boys trooped back into the hajat-ghar. The doors slammed shut and keys turned in the locks.

‘Biren De has passed away.’ Ganesh-da broke the news. ‘He was accidentally shot by a new recruit he was training.’

The boys gathered around in silence. Ananda breathed a silent prayer.

‘The importance of the cautions we preach must never be forgotten. The firearm must be treated with respect,’ said Ananta-da, breaking the silence. ‘Those handling them for the first time are bound to get overexcited. It is the duty of the instructor to prevent accidents.’

‘When we began there was no one to teach us. My first brush with death is still etched in my memory. Julu-da had sent me to Burul to fetch a pistol. It was the first time I was meeting Anurup-da. He had not been told that I would be coming and was a little hesitant. I gave him the password – khoka. What kind exactly do you want, he asked me. The seven shot automatic pistol, with the S+S mark, I replied. He left me in his room and disappeared. A youth arrived some time later and left a parcel on the bed. Master-da and Julu-da had warned me not to touch it. Anurup-da returned soon afterwards and it was then that we opened it. I had never seen a pistol before. I was spellbound. How could I be its bearer and not be privy to its secrets? I pleaded with Anurup-da. As far as I knew, not even Master-da could claim to be particularly dextrous with one. We were admiring the pistol, trying to figure out its mechanism when an ominous click sounded. A bullet flicked the tip of my ear and the cook in the kitchen cried out. His right arm had begun to spurt. Anurup-da had frozen, his face ashen. Then he reached out to nudge me and realized I was unhurt. The pistol was quickly hidden under the mattress and we dashed into the kitchen. The cook’s wounds were minor and a flurry of first aid took place. The report had sounded through the mess and it was imperative to calm him immediately. Leaving me to deal with the cook, he rushed back to his room, returned with the parcel and all but pushed me out before the crowds began to gather. I learnt a valuable lesson that day, one that I am reiterating today: always, always point a loaded weapon towards the ground

or towards the sky.

DOROTHY YOUNIE, APRIL 1931

What a lovely holiday John has had since ...

Donovan was at Kaunchali, living on the SL 'May Queen' – the launch that had transported Dorothy and her girls from Barisal to Chandpur the previous year. He was working terribly hard. His day, he said, began at 5.30 a.m.; he was ashore by 7.30; followed by 1½ miles of cycling which took him to his first place of work; then another six miles of cycling which took him to the Khas Mahal office; finally at 5 p.m. it was time to cycle back to the launch.

He may be perfectly sure he is wasting his time, for whether the court convicts or not, the accused will all get off. We are in such a strong position now and 'the atmosphere' is 'so much sweeter', to borrow the viceregal phraseology that we dare not hang a murderer. In any case we will be justified in not doing it because if we do we shall only precipitate another Cawnpore.⁸

Have you in your wildest dreams thought of a position so absurdly miserable or so miserably absurd as that in which the British administration finds itself? I had a letter from Peddie literally ex-sepulchro. It was posted the night before he was shot. He registered it to me for safety's sake as he told me a good deal about the state of Midnapore therein. He was buried when I received the letter.

Peddie's murder was an absolute scandal. Dorothy could not have agreed more. On the evening of 7 April 1931, District Magistrate James Peddie⁹ had been attending the Midnapore district school's education exhibition when two young men fired six shots and disappeared. Two surgeries had been conducted to remove the bullets but Peddie had succumbed by the next day. Bimal Dasgupta had been identified as one of the assailants¹⁰ but had been absconding since.

And it is not the last. I hear they are worrying about the lives of the Chittagong tribunal. Of course you must all be very careful, I mean John in particular. It is rotten for you all to have to submit to such precautions. John has had an

experience which I do not envy. Personally, I am being well protected. We capture correspondence daily, which shows that the revolutionary crowd are as active and as mysterious as ever. But seated up in full view of Kanchenjunga, Prentice – blast him! – he will not believe. He has the impertinence, I am told, to say that nothing has happened in Barisal and we are exaggerating. It is poor thanks for having prevented trouble in one's district – That man! – but no I will not let myself go.

The government had already moved to Darjeeling for the hot weather, and Prentice, the chief secretary, appeared to have lost touch with what was going on. It had been over twenty days since the riots had begun in Cawnpore and they showed no signs of abating. The Muslims were raising a demand for separate electorates at the Second Round Table Conference due later that year, and Mr Gandhi was trying desperately to calm them, declaring he was ready to advise the Hindus to concede to practically all the demands made by the Muslims.

Thank goodness most of the women are going away soon. John will agree with that sentiment of mine. The hot weather is no time for them here. They get very cranky and crotchety and we have trouble enough without that addition.

Dorothy began laughing, for Donovan had added a hasty:

You would be different. We should look upon you as one of ourselves, I fancy, and gladly retain you amongst us.

ANANDA PRASAD GUPTA

‘My name is R.D. Todd.’

A sergeant of the Calcutta Mounted Police was in the witness stand.

‘We got out of our cars some distance off and walked along the road towards the house. There was a light on in the upper floor. I cannot say whether it continued burning.’

Ananda's toes curled instinctively. Makhon's murderers!

‘I had an electric torch with me. Four men were approaching in a file, one behind the other. I was about a yard away when the first man hoisted himself on to the wall. I flashed my torch and asked who they were. I was fired at immediately and I ducked behind the wall. The first man had fired at me point-blank from about a yard away and had missed. I guess he was more surprised than I was. I heard an order from the other side of the tank – “fire!” It may have been Mr Bartley. I am not positive whether it was he or Mr McKinty or Sir Charles Tegart. From my position behind the wall I fired my four rounds at the man, who was standing in the water ... the man had fired at me and I was bound to fire. In a minute or so there was some more firing.’

‘Shahbaash sergeant! So you weren’t the first one to open fire!’ Lokenath-da yelled out.

Anger and tears sprung to Ananda’s eyes. A whole new version was being fabricated.

‘How many of you carried out the operation?’ Srish Babu was a Chandannagar man.

‘I cannot say. Besides our team, there were ...’ the man pursed his lips. ‘Two, three ... twenty-five? I mean the DIG Burdwan Range had also joined us.’

The undertrial dock had broken out in howls of derision. No clue? The police had no clue as to how many had been sent against four revolutionaries?

Sergeant Keywood had taken his place in the witness box. ‘There was more firing and I moved eastwards along the lane and on reaching the point where the compound wall begins, I flashed my torch over the wall into the compound. Towards the south side of the tank I saw a man just disappearing under the water. About five minutes after Lokenath Bal had been brought into the lane, more firing took place to the south of the compound and somebody shouted that they had caught two more men ... there was more firing from the east ... He, Makhon Ghoshal, had just disappeared. Just after that I heard shots from the south. I cannot say if there were shots from the south before he disappeared. But before he disappeared, I had heard shots from the north. I shouted out that I had seen a man disappear in the water.’

‘So the firing continued from the north and the south even after Makhon Ghoshal had been shot and fell into the water.’ Srish Babu observed.

‘These nine regulations 0.450 revolver cartridges are similar to those I found in Ganesh Ghosh’s pocket and those are four of the home-made cartridges I found on him ... I found the revolver on the ground; where the smaller of the two was lying, I found the automatic pistol and electric torch ... the younger one did not have the look of having fallen senseless when he was pulled off, and when I saw him just inside the gate, after he had been pulled in there, he was conscious. I was told to keep them covered and I did. They were lying on their bellies with their faces downwards and their arms bent under their chests. As far as I remember, Mr Bartley remained there with me ...’

This was Sergeant Walters, who had put his boot heel to good effect.

The Chinsura police inspector, Bimalapada Banerjee, took the stand. ‘There were a number of sergeants and some superior officers – including Mr Waterworth, DIG Burdwan range, and my superintendent of police. There were also some French police and officials – including the administrator, the commissioner of police of Chandannagar. The accused and the articles found with them were all brought by the French police and some sergeants to the office of the commissaire du police. The commissioner of police was there. He examined the accused through an interpreter. The Calcutta sergeants went away. I had been told by my SP to wait, as he told me the prisoners would be extradited. The accused and the articles were taken before the French magistrate. It took half an hour or so. In the meantime, I rang up Chinsura and a police party came and we took the three accused and the search list to the district magistrate of Hooghly, Mr J.B. Kindersley ...’

‘Can you tell us why Sir Charles Tegart and Messrs Bartley and McKinty have gone on leave one after the other?’

‘No, I cannot.’

‘Could it be because of the Chandannagar affair? Which law permits Sir Charles Tegart to fight a battle with the revolutionaries in French territory?’

‘I cannot say.’

‘And how did the French permit them to take the boys out of Chandannagar?’

‘I cannot say.’

‘Have you been asked to be very cautious so that the name of the person who killed the boy may not be brought up?’

‘No.’

Bimalapada Banerjee was, after all, a government man.

The handcuffed boys tied with rope round their waists hurled abuses at the sergeants who had taken part in the Chandannagar operation. Emotions were running high. Mr Shooter, in a bid to control them, landed a punch on Fakir Sen’s nose. The boy dropped to his knees, bleeding profusely. There was chaos all around, the onlookers demanding instant revenge.

‘Shooter, I warn you,’ Ananta-da barked. ‘Stop or you will pay a heavy penalty for this very British behaviour.’

ANANTA LAL SINGH, MONDAY, 27 APRIL 1931

‘An inquiry has been held into the police inertia at Kanpur.’

The news had been published on 24 April, the same evening that the curfew had been announced. The boys out on bail had been herded back into jail and Ananta, Ganesh and Lokenath had been moved back to their individual cells. The weekend had been spent in isolation.

Madhu Guha had memorized the news before he had been ordered to report to jail. Chittagong had been declared a disturbed area. The authorities, fearing the anniversary of the raid, had had some 400 or 500 Gurkha troops brought in. The caution was evident as he was being taken to court that Monday morning. The streets had emptied out except for the armoured cars that patrolled them. Madhu updated him quickly as he took in the new waiting room. They had all been brought into a room adjacent to the courtroom. ‘Homes are being searched and random arrests being made.’

‘Master-da is not happy with you,’ muttered Ardhendu, darkly.

Ananta was taken aback.

‘He said you should not have lost your patience with Shooter and issued an ultimatum. He said there was no need for you to look out for your prestige at a time like this.’

The words hit home. Ananta was deflated for a couple of seconds. ‘You went to meet him?’

‘Sarat Babu was here.’ Ardhendu’s lips barely moved. ‘He brought four freshly made hand grenades packed with TNT and Rs 2,000 and asked me to hand them over to Surjya Sen.’

Ananta was stunned. For a man of his stature, Sarat Babu was fearless to the point of being blasé. Accidental explosions were frequent with handmade explosives and yet he thought nothing of carrying four of them in his suitcase.

‘Captain McCartney Filgate of the second battalion of the Highland Light Infantry who had been called out for duty has testified that it is police incompetence that led to the tremendous loss of life and property.’ Madhu was concluding. ‘In other words, the police actually encouraged the communal violence.’

‘In here.’ A sergeant jerked his head towards a door. Ananta made his way across. The little room had a single barred window; two sergeants stood with revolvers drawn with seven or eight armed police in attendance. Mr Shooter strode in.

‘Drop the pants?’

Ananta looked up in surprise. Had he heard correctly?

‘You heard me. Now strip.’

They were searched at the jail gate every day before leaving and on their return from court. Was Shooter about to carry out a strip-search yet again? From the looks of it the man was enjoying himself. But what had become evident was that the police no longer trusted the jail authorities.

‘Face me. Now, about-turn!’

This humiliating scenario was to be a part of the new routine to be followed every single day.

The workmen had been busy over the weekend altering the look of the courtroom. The dock for the accused had been converted into a gigantic cage enclosed in a double layer of wire netting. Armed sergeants stood outside its door, removing the handcuffs as the boys filed in.

For days now, the people lined up on the streets had begun crying out to be saved from police atrocities. But today it was the guardians who had gathered before the dock. ‘Khan Sahib Ahsanulla is getting out of hand. His methods are becoming barbaric. How long before you do something?’

It was a question that haunted Ananta: how long would they wait for the dynamite? With the stuff that was ready and waiting, it was possible to go ahead but Ardhendu’s arrest had been a great setback. Master-da, Ananta knew, would by now have delegated Ardhendu’s responsibilities to Kalpana and she was to be helped by Makhon’s brother Benu Ghoshal, Noni Das and Prabhat Dutt. But without Ardhendu, the link with Master-da had been snapped. How would they now decide upon the zero hour?

The guardians had approached Mr Srish Bose: why were the boys, who had been granted bail in the Chittagong Armoury Raid Case, being held under regulation III? Mr Bose promised to bring up the matter.

‘It is time,’ Ganesh addressed both Ananta and Lokenath. ‘We take our defence into our own hands from today.’

JOHN YOUNIE, 4 MAY 1931

Hands raised in farewell waved poignantly through the murky smokescreen thrown to windward by the departing ‘Chantala’. John waved his topee aloft in one reluctant valedictory gesture to that gallant loyal figure silhouetted against the starboard rails. Dorothy, who had hoped that their fourth would be born in Kalimpong, was on her way back to England, taking with her their wee lassies

and Chrissie.

As events unfolded, it had become only too clear that home leave would be imperative for him once the tribunal ended. Thus it was on 4 May, with no security in mind and with no advance intimation to those at home who would have to arrange accommodation, there was an embarking on the 'Chantala' at Chittagong for Rangoon and thence to Tilbury by the Henderson line on the SS 'Burma'.

Mrs Cumming gently touched his arm, breaking his reverie.

'May I offer you and Jean a lift, back to your bungalow?' he said.

Her husband was in charge of the steamer service and she had come along that morning with Jean Johnson to wave farewell. He was glad to have their company at a time when the emptiness struck with full force. A long day panned before him: the cross-examination of Bennet, the handwriting expert, as far as the noisy and impertinent monkeys in the cage would permit, for the Big Three had elected to represent themselves; the arrival of the porcupine procession at 4.45 p.m. followed by a round of golf.

'In a day or two your heart will lose that leaden feeling as will Dorothy's,' she comforted.

He nodded in resignation. For him, it would have to be the anodyne of work, and for her, the anodyne of keeping the kids interested and keen and fit while the 'Burma' rolled slowly across the sultry Indian Ocean. Every mile that took them further and further from Chittagong would be new and untravelled, with choppy seas just outside the Karnaphuli bar, but thereafter, he hoped, it would all prove plain sailing.

The rooms were bare and desolate and barely eight hours after he had bade them farewell John found himself compelled to sit down to write. A letter, Dorothy would not read till before the month's end.

As far as epistles were concerned, this one is one of John's typical washouts. He was still castigating himself when old Johur came in with a pair of polished shoes.

'It did not take you long to do the job tonight, Johur?'

‘No, sir. But I should willingly do twenty pairs if only we had them all with us again.’

NINE

ANANTA LAL SINGH, 5 MAY 1931

Bricks had been piled up outside the door. Ananta's heart sank. The floor of the ante-cell was to be redone and bricked up. As he climbed into the metal cage in the courtroom he could see that Lokenath and Ganesh were troubled by the same thoughts.

‘How will we recover our canisters?’ Ganesh whispered.

‘More importantly, how deep will the rajmistri dig?’

Most of their stuff lay at a depth of twenty inches but one cigarette box with three motor headlight bulbs had been buried hurriedly in a shallow pit just the previous evening. He had planned to bury it deeper later that day. ‘If they find the cigarette box, they will not stop. They will dig up the entire jail grounds.’

A nervous anticipation hung about the jail as they made their way in that evening. The warders, sipahis and the jamadar went creeping about their business. Mr Johnson was in the jailor's office. He ignored Ananta as he was led through. Gyan Babu looked subdued. Ananta was led to the hajat-ghar. Ganesh and Lokenath followed close behind. It needed no guessing: the individual cells were all being dug up. But would they be able to figure out the other six sites? He had his answer by the morning: a trench had been dug all around and was being gradually extended towards the centre in the manner used for the retrieval of landmines. Cartridges had emerged from under the banyan tree, daggers from the passage, revolvers somewhere else. One discovery led to another.

New rules were instituted and all the guards changed. From now on, four sentries accompanied each person to the bathroom or the toilet. Meals became highly supervised affairs with everybody sitting in a line eating under heavy security.

JOHN YOUNIE, 7 MAY 1931

The howling of the wind and the banging of the shutters had woken him. It was 4 a.m. The electric lights had gone out. Dragging himself reluctantly from bed, John rushed around closing the windows and the ventilators. There had been no sign of a gathering storm the previous night and the windows had all been left open. The drawing room was flooded. The rain came in through the roof as if it were a sieve. As he removed his files and the furniture out of the way of the falling drops, his thoughts turned to the 'Chantala'. Were she to encounter a gale like this, it would be distinctly unpleasant for all on board, to say the least. Further sleep was impossible. He went out on to the verandah and stared at the rain coming down in sheets.

The telegram, confirming that they were all comfortably aboard the bigger ship, would not come before the evening of 8 May. It would also confirm that the ayah had begun her return journey. In her possession would be one of Dorothy's long and detailed letters. He would simply have to be patient until then. Then would come the really trying wait, for the great snag about going by a Henderson boat was that the next port of call from where a letter could be despatched would be Port Said. It meant he wouldn't hear from her until the first week of June.

He lit a cigarette and settled into a chair. The week was proving to be a dreadful one filled with hoops and loops and links and curves. The Big Three had begun their cross-examination of Bennet and were far from done. The result was that the court was being subjected to the tedium of having to listen to a rain of stupid, irrelevant and often impudent questions. The three were determined on dragging the handwriting expert almost letter by letter through the various documents he had given his opinion on. At this rate, the earliest date by which they could hope to finish the prosecution witnesses would now be the middle of June and not the middle of May as he had hoped.

Despite the rain, light had begun to filter in. The tin guttering along the eaves on the north side of the roof had been blown on to the front lawn. The tip of the Woodbine glowed as John pulled on it. He would write a note to Mr White of the PWD.

There was a stamping in the porch. Johnson had arrived rather early. 'I suggest you take in Captain Jones. He is getting a bit fed up living in the Circuit House and has been asking me to find him a home.' He made no attempt to remove the streaming Macintosh. 'Besides it would be safer as far as you are concerned.'

'I suppose, Johnny, it has occurred to your rather fertile imagination that they could smuggle a time bomb in, while I am away at court, and slip it under my mattress, timing it for the hour when I am wrapt and thoroughly lapt in slumber's deepest depths?'

The humour was lost on Johnson. 'Absconders are being sheltered by the Hindus in the areas outside of Chittagong,' he continued. 'Potiya and the like. Punitive police will be quartered in the area from today.'

'Should hit the local intelligentsia where they are most vulnerable ... in the pocket.'

'The military forces should then be able to go back to Shillong by Monday. Kemm has been finding the colonel and his methods rather direct. We will hold back a company of the Gurkhas however ...'

'Until the atmosphere is sufficiently sweet for them to leave?'

Johnson smiled absently and left.

PRITILATA WADDADAR

Pritilata stood on her toes, peering through the wire netting. She strained against the bright glare on the outside to make out the shapes within the dark interiors of the room. An officer sat inside smoking one cigarette after another and a typist clacked away. A white sergeant sat out in the open with his registers, a few paces behind. He played with his pencil, never taking his eyes off her. A figure appeared within the doorway and walked slowly as it was led past the officer's table to the window with the netting.

'Didi?' The shackled hands were lifted in the traditional greeting but the eyes

strayed past her.

‘Kakima could not come,’ Priti said. ‘I have come alone.’

It was Phutu-da who had first told her about Ram Krishna and driven her to a kind of desperation to meet this enlightened soul that would soon be lost to the world. His words had mesmerized her, drawing her to the gates of Alipore Central Jail again and again: Lajja, ghrina, bhoy ... shame, hate, fear ... if these remain, character cannot be built. The building of character is a great achievement.

The sergeant’s eyes bore into the back of her head, crawling down her neck. Priti drew the end of her sari about her. An armed sipahi drew uncomfortably close. ‘How do you spend your time?’

‘Pundit-da was asking me the same thing yesterday. He and I were allowed to meet for five minutes.’ Ram Krishna laughed. ‘I am running short of time. The books in the library have all been read ... yet so many of my questions remain unanswered. The world is truly a wondrous place.’

The sipahi had moved off to join his colleagues by the gate. The sergeant licked the point of his pencil and held it poised over his papers.

‘Putu-di came yesterday,’ he mouthed.

Priti nodded. ‘She was with them at Chandannagar.’

Ram Krishna’s face crumpled. ‘I am about to leave you all, but that is not the cause of my pain. It is my incompetence. I will have to carry this sorrow into my next life. It is far worse than all the physical pain they have had to endure.’

It was as if he had struck her. ‘You cannot judge the success of this endeavour by the result of every incident,’ she gasped. ‘The question of your incompetence does not arise.’

‘Please tell the dadas to forgive me.’

‘Don’t ... you will see. History will not forget you.’ The tears spilled over.

‘It does not matter. What matters is what lies ahead. If I am born in a dependent

Bharat again, I will willingly give my life once more.'

His head jerked backwards in surprise as he was pulled away from the window.
The interview was over.

ANANTA LAL SINGH

Steadily

Step by step

Forward marched

To the grave

To the field of fame

Forward marched

The youths brave.

Lokenath's rich baritone held the members of the audience in the courtroom
spellbound.

When can their glory fade?

O the brave fight they gave

Honour the Chittagong brigade.

Ganesh's verses were finding their way to the streets and by-lanes, being recited at every haat and village. The tribunal was about to walk in. The court clerks, who had gathered about the cage, scurried back to their places. A big decision was to be made known that day. The boys settled down quickly.

And there it was. The boys out on bail had been released. Mr Younie had agreed with the point and put it up to the authorities.

'It's a trap.' Ananta and Ganesh warned Ardhendu. 'Be very very careful.'

Ardhendu nodded sagely. Caution was not about to frighten him into inaction. 'We need another godown. If it is all right with you I will speak to Madhu Guha. His family owns one. They use it for their business.'

They had been handcuffed and taken into the side room for the duration of the tiffin break. The boys waited drowsily, slumped on the benches when Santosh Babu led Sarat Babu in. It had been months since they had seen him. Sarat Babu's presence worked as a tonic.

'Then Tegra opened martyrdom's gate ... the words left not one dry eye behind.' He patted Ganesh on the back. 'Aar, Lokenath, abritti chhara aar kichhu? ... What else besides recitation?'

It brought a twinkle to Lokenath's eye. 'Ki, sahib?' he called to Mr Lewis who stood on guard outside. 'Your panja against mine?'

A pleasant laugh answered him and Mr Lewis ordered Lokenath's handcuffs be removed. The sergeants arranged a table and two chairs. A third was arranged for Sarat Babu so he could be the umpire. Placing their elbows on the table the two powerful hands clasped each other firmly.

'One, two, three!'

Jaws clenched. The two arms quivered and the lines of the muscles stood out.

Sarat Babu led the cheer and the room erupted in whoops of delight.

Mr Lewis had broken out into a good-natured grin. 'Look after that hand, brother,' he said, as he gave Lokenath's a good shake.

But Ananta's thoughts were elsewhere. Rajat's mother, Debu and Ananda's mother would have to be involved now. Weapons and implements needed to be hidden. He mentally drafted the letters he would send to Binodini and Monorama Mashima ...the rest of your sons are intent on carrying on the fight ...

JOHN YOUNIE, MONDAY, 18 MAY 1931

John cast an anxious look at the sky as he prepared to tee off.

'Pretty threatening! But the wind should keep the clouds on the move ...' he kept up a running commentary as he concentrated on the ball, waggling his hips. It flew off in a graceful arc winging its way across the stretch of green. He was in fine fettle. Today, he would give Ricardo Richardson a run for his money, in addition to the administration of the usual weekly chastisement due to the National Bank.

By the sixth tee the heavens opened up and came down sixteen annas. Ricardo made a dash in the direction of the club garages and John to his bungalow. Johur would well be inclined to believe that he had been out swimming instead of going on a golfing excursion.

Johur ran out to meet him on the steps. 'Like living in Agartala again,' he said, guiding him to a dry corner in the verandah.

The drawing room was awash and the rain poured in as if the roof had been removed. The sweeper was plying the mop furiously.

'The kid's dressing room?'

Johur smiled apologetically before hurrying back.

'That man needs a stinker,' raged John heaping a string of curses, as profane as they could get, on the absent White's head. 'We might as well be growing mushrooms on these floors ... if he doesn't get a move on I may as well out and go live in the Circuit House.'

He dragged a cane chair out of the way of the several drips and settled down in his sodden clothes, resigned to a long wait. He couldn't have been gladder that Dorothy and the children, bowling along the surface of the Indian Ocean, were far from the poisonous banks of the Karnaphuli. The rest of the month was to be a complete loaf as the Khan Bahadur, the Muslim member of the tribunal, who had fallen sick the previous Friday, had been diagnosed with malaria and prescribed bed rest. With the two gazetted holidays and the three days off for Muharram that the Khan Bahadur was entitled to, the trial would be pushed even further off than ever. But though the tribunal president's work had ceased for the time being, the district judge was expected to carry on as usual.

The ayah had returned by the 'Chantala' on 13 May, bringing with her the expected letter. The 'Chantala' had not behaved properly. She had driven both Dorothy and Chrissie a bit off colour and poor little Elspet had taken a dislike to the iron cow and its produce. Dorothy had spent her days in the very hot and sticky little saloon writing out the luggage labels and sticking them on to the many items of baggage awaiting transfer to the 'Burma', for in the hurried departure that had taken place, this last requirement had been neglected. Thunder rolled ominously. John held his breath waiting for the lightning that was to follow. When it came on it was magnificent. So bright and continuous was the display that he could have read his newspaper or, for that matter, caught up with his letter writing. This is good, he found himself thinking. The raiyats can now begin sowing the paddy and the seedlings will be ready for replanting by the time the fields are emptied following the post-monsoon harvest. The second harvesting for the year would take place by December. The great rivers of India had held for him great charm in those early days when the disillusionment and frustrations were yet to set in – his salad days, he smiled to himself. Though the Karnaphuli could not boast of a course as long as the Ganges, it too, in the flood season, came down in great volumes carting the earth solidly from one spot and depositing it in another. Chars or islands of alluvial silt were, as a result, constantly building up and, until they were washed away by the next season's rains, formed cultivable lands of great fertility – all of them government estates and a good source of revenue with the natives paying rent directly to the government. A few succeeded in assuming a measure of stability and had turned into farmlands and permanent habitations, accommodating as many as ten villages, though life there was very primitive and the advent of the sahib extremely rare.

He would sit down to write after dinner, once Johur and the sweeper were done.

It would be pointless to hope to catch Dorothy at any port of call beyond Port Said; best perhaps to send it directly home. But in view of the recent announcement in the Statesman that the airmail would now take only six of nine days from Karachi to Croydon, he could perhaps dash off a chit to Marseilles, for in a week they would be rounding the corner into the Mediterranean.

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A group of boys worked feverishly in the dark. Shovels and spades plied furiously, emptying out the earth on to a dhuti stretched out beside them. A tin can was lowered deep into the earth and the lead wires arranged carefully running through the wild grass on the side. The loose soil was packed back in and tramped into place. Then they ran a short way up the road and began all over again.

The pit was near completion when an owl hooted. It sent them into a frenzy: one gathered the implements, some bundled the loose soil out of sight while the rest dragged a sturdy iron sheet over the hole and dived behind the bushes.

Love Lane went past the divisional commissioner's bungalow to join the road that led to Paltan Maidan where the tribunal president and other senior British officials lived. A patrol van made its way down the road, its powerful headlight beam lighting up the surrounding area as it passed. It would be back every fifteen minutes.

Ardhendu leapt to his feet and ran back to the worksite. Bhola ran behind and caught the other end of the iron sheet. Nibaran, helped by Pramod Dasgupta and Prafulla Mallick, dragged the bundle of soil out from behind the bushes while Arun Dastidar came running with the digging implements.

Though the curfew had been called off on 19 May, they still had to be extremely careful. The work on Love Lane would have to be finished well before dawn; before Ardhendu's detectives discovered the figure in his bed to be a fake. His team had several sites to complete: the road that led to the top of the tila where the police superintendent lived; the kutchery building, atop Fairy Hill, of which

the court was a part; the wooden seating arrangement at the cricket ground; the Circuit House where the senior officials met.

PREMLATA

The noise woke Premlata. The police were swarming all over the courtyard.

‘Cover your head,’ hissed her mother-in-law as she tugged at her hand. The women stood shivering in the courtyard as the cold wind that followed the incessant rain, swirled around.

The pile of washed pots and pans came down with a crash as the police searched every nook and cranny. Kali’s father peered helplessly through the open door watching the bedding being ripped apart. Iron trunks were broken open and emptied. There was nothing to be found among the stored clothes. The men moved into the shed flashing their electric torches, prodding the gunny bags with daggers, inserting their hands past the flow of grain to get a feel of the interiors. Curious villagers had begun to gather outside and faces peeped over the top of the boundary wall.

Nothing had been found. Premlata rushed back in. Her mother-in-law followed her with the only lamp that had been saved from destruction, its lambent beam lighting up the mayhem. Without a word, Kali’s mother got down to clearing up. Premlata busied herself picking up the strewn clothes. She bundled the torn kanthas and put them aside; they would need several hours of darning before they would be usable again.

‘Sweep out the sheds,’ her mother-in-law said quietly. The night was coming to an end and faint daylight glowed outside the door. ‘Take two of the new gunny jute sacks for the grain.’ Both women were hugely relieved that the police had found no incriminating evidence and that Kali had not been home that night.

The scene outside made Premlata gasp. Her father-in-law and his younger brother were sawing at the base of the jujube tree. Kali’s kakima squatted by the side watching. She rose to join Premlata in the shed.

‘We need charcoal again. They,’ she jerked her head at the two men, ‘had to dump all the gunpowder into the well.’

Eight months of labour had been lost in an instant.

JOHN YOUNIE, 1 JUNE 1931

Monday had arrived again and all that the laggard chaprassi could bring in was Dorothy’s copy of the BMJ. He returned to his newspaper ... the fascists and the Vatican were at it; police had entered the catholic offices and the Pope had addressed the press, deploring the brutality and the violence ... Tried in cage! Humiliating methods! At a fascist trial of professors ... the humiliating spectacle of cultured men being led handcuffed like felons to a cage was witnessed when seven intellectuals were charged with conspiring to overthrow fascism, states the Rome correspondent of the Times ...

John rose to leave for court. Of course he shouldn’t really be expecting mail until Monday next, for the family was possibly only about stepping down the gangway at Tilbury. This was one of the biggest snags of the Rangoon route – the unavoidable, interminable month of suspense.

The first day of June! Weather simply poisonous. He made a mental note as he got into the car. The storms that had come with May had long passed and it looked as if Chittagong was in for a very hot spell until the monsoon broke. The forecast was that it was still a fortnight off. He settled into the seat waiting for the convoy to take off. There was that grainy feeling again in his throat. He pulled out his handkerchief and sneezed violently. A great pity that his physician-in-ordinary was not by his side to give him the much needed heart to heart.

Dr Srigyan Chatterji was waiting in the sickbay at the kutchery building. The throat was examined with many cluckings of the tongue and a stinging application of Mandl’s Iodine Paint made with a firm vigorous hand. ‘Every morning for the next five days,’ he said as he handed him a bottle of a cinnamon cough mixture – one of his own compositions.

He would have very much appreciated a prescription of a couple of Aspros, but Dr Chatterji had seemed unimpressed by the fevered brow and streaming eyes and he wasn't someone to be argued with. He simply could not afford to spend a single day in bed this week, and then there was the formal opening of the new bridge over the Karnaphuli the coming Sunday, the one Mr Monk the bridge builder had at long last completed. Mrs Bliss was to inaugurate it and the AB Railway had promised a gigantic tiffin at the club ... he would have to feel better by then. Wearily, he prepared to sit on his eyelash to distribute even-handed justice.

The Big Three were relentless: It is a matter of life and death to me. I am trying hard to extract the truth from the witness. It will be a great injustice to me if the question is disallowed ... It is impossible to get a fair chance of defence. I must file an affidavit.

Not one attempt at explaining any of the circumstances appearing in the evidence against him but instead he indulges in theatrical vituperation, groaned John, remembering the arrogant braggadocio of Ananta Lal Singh's letters.

'This trial is a mockery, the court is prejudiced and the government tyrannical and unjust.' The accused was yelling from within the cage.

This case was going to last far, far longer than it should. John massaged his temples giving Mr Singh some time to calm down. The punkhawala had caught the import of the proceedings from where he squatted, for he had, without prompting, stepped up the speed of the breeze blowing around the judicial wig of the hakim. The last letter from home had informed him that Auntie Meg had been telling everybody that he wore a wig in court! She was labouring under a ridiculous mistake, for in a letter he had said I am writing it in court in one of the few moments in which I have laid aside my wig! He hadn't expected his facetious phrase to be taken literally.

He hoped some of the cool air was reaching the dock. Of course both sides were responsible, though not equally: the prosecution had introduced a number of incidents and witnesses that might have been easily dispensed without any appreciable detriment to the case for the Crown. And the three accused who had represented themselves since April-end insisted on subjecting each witness to a minute and protracted cross-examination which would have been just as effective if it had been reduced by 90 per cent.

Following the discovery of three canisters of dynamite in a house in Chittagong (Bengal), after finding the four canisters of explosives under the divisional commissioner's office and the arrest of a young Indian carrying a similar canister, the district magistrate has forbidden middleclass Hindus between the ages of 16 and 26 years within the municipal limits to leave their houses between 7 o'clock at night and 5 o'clock in the morning. Railway and Port employees, who have been ordered to obtain passes from the police, have been excepted.¹

Less than three days after the 200 Assam Rifles men had taken over, and the last of the Gurkhas had boarded the train back to Shillong, news had come pouring in. On the morning of Wednesday, 3 June – at just about dawn to be precise – a few constables, having finished their nightly patrol, were brushing their teeth in the large tank of Lal Dighi down by the jail when one of them spied a youth, whom he had encountered months before as an enthusiastic picketer, walking along with a bulky package under his arm. The constable called out to him to stop but the youth took to his heels and when overtaken, was found to have under his arm, wrapped in cloth, a large tin canister about 20 pounds in weight. His story that it contained rice was not believed and he was taken to the thana where he confessed that it contained explosives and that there were other similar

canisters planted elsewhere.

Security had been beefed up as expected. In the course of the afternoon, while still at court, John had received information that the police had not only raided certain houses where they found three more canisters, they had also started digging just below the wall of the kutchery building. By the time they had wound up for the day, four canisters had been recovered from the court premises, each attached to yards and yards of insulated wire lying underneath the grass, the leads extending to something like sixty feet.

‘The idea with these was apparently to create a diversion,’ observed John to his colleagues. ‘At a suitable moment the canisters would go off with a whaleuva bang – all troops would rush to the spot to see what the devil was happening and an attempt would be made to rescue our little friends from court.’

Thursday passed without incident, but by night more information had come in and a house was raided on the bank of the Fairy Tank, under Richardson’s hill. Under the floor of the three rooms were three more canisters with insulated leads to each of them extending under the ground to some distance outside the house.

The weekend brought Mr Maitra, Dr Sheldon’s second-in-command of bomb disposal, and Johnny devoted the Monday evening to bringing the Chittagong gentry up to date.

‘Eleven of these delightful presentation canisters have been recovered,’ he said, ‘and Mr Maitra exploded one in the police lines yesterday. They contain a black powder and in the centre of each is an electric bulb with the glass removed and the filament wrapped in guncotton. To explode them, all that is needed is an ordinary, large torchlight dry cell battery ... put on the switch; the current passes into the filament through the insulated lead; the filament glows brightly, ignites the cotton and bang. And some bang it was too! ... The house near the Fairy Tank was a trap. There the idea apparently was that the police should be induced to raid the house on some well-chosen night, and once the raiding party was well inside, the watchers posted at the end of the leads should press their switches and well – there would be helluva bang and goodbye to the house and the raiding party. Very ingenious and pretty sinister!’

‘The beauty of these devices, from the army’s point of view,’ said Lieutenant Colonel Buckland, ‘is obviously that the hand that causes the bang can be

stationed at a nice comfortable distance off – with a ten to one chance of a clean getaway.’

‘One of the youths arrested has squealed pretty extensively – so we hope to get on the track pretty soon of a few more interesting canisters,’ said Johnny.

Bombs were the flavour of the week, mused John. The other bomb the newspapers spoke of had turned out to be a flop. An attempt had been made to wreck the post office at Shyam Bazaar in the centre of the Indian quarter at Calcutta. Explosives packed into a coconut shell, with the fuse half burnt away had been discovered among the parcels on the counter. The bomb addressed to the postmaster had been left by a small boy and had gone unnoticed for several hours.

‘The thing to be marked,’ continued Buckland, ‘is that many of the articles found in these systematic affairs were similar to some of the articles discovered in the jail a few days back and that the plan of the Armoury Raid Case accused also appeared to be to blow off the walls of the jail and attempt to escape in a body.’

John stirred uneasily in his chair. ‘I must remember to assure Dorothy that none have as yet been found in my cabbage patch,’ he laughed as the meeting came to an end.

ANANTA LAL SINGH

‘Was it Nibaran that was careless?’ Ananta, Ganesh and Lokenath sat around Ardhendu. He had been arrested in a predawn raid on 4 June at Kali Kinkar De’s kaka’s house. Kali and Bhola had succeeded in escaping but Ardhendu, Anil Rakshit, Sushil Sen and Prafulla Mallick had been arrested along with Kali’s kaka, Nishi De. Robi Sen and Hriday Das had also been arrested on that first day and Prabhat Dutt picked up later. The Dynamite Conspiracy Case was being framed: a bit of a joke, since there was not a single stick of dynamite that had been acquired or used.

‘The boy who was supposed to have accompanied him ditched at the last

moment. The last two bombs to be planted on Fairy Hill were left. Nibaran should have done just one and come away but in trying to finish the task was delayed.'

'Treachery,' muttered Lokenath sadly. 'That other boy must have been an agent.'

PREMLATA

Premlata trembled a little. She had never seen a thana before, let alone be made to stand before a number of strange men.

'Is your husband in the city?'

She shook her head, keeping her eyes fixed to the floor.

'What work does he do?'

'Business.' The voice was barely audible and muffled further by the end of the sari she held clenched between her teeth.

'Business? What does your man do for a living?'

She was too much of a village bumpkin to be even conscious of what had been taking place around her. The officer nodded to a constable who addressed her. 'This way.' He led her to the door saying, 'You can go now.'

There had been no sign of Kali since that awful morning when the police came. The boys who were in the house had all been thrashed and bundled into the waiting vans. Her father-in-law, his brother ... none of them had been spared. But the women had been let off. They had only insisted upon her coming to the thana. Where and how would she ever get news of Kali? There was no one she could turn to.

TEN

KALPANA DUTT

An oil lamp flickered in the corner, its glow limited to its immediate vicinity. The rain had slowed down. It still fell steadily but the howling wind had died down. Kalpana sat waiting on the little cot within the folds of the mosquito netting. She was not quite sure as to where it was that she had been brought to but it seemed to be somewhere deep in the interiors of the countryside.

She scratched thoughtfully at the weals that were pushing their way through her skin. The mosquitoes even seemed to have got through her hair to her scalp.

Two figures came into the room. She strained to see as clearly as possible.

‘Hullo,’ said one in English. It was the shorter of the two.

‘Hullo,’ she replied timidly.

‘How did the intermediate science exams go?’

So this one was Master-da. ‘Not very well.’ Kalpana was embarrassed. She had joined Chittagong College that month as per the instructions sent to her.

‘Why?’ The voice was disapproving. ‘Have you been given too much party work?’

It was not going very well, this first meeting. It was making her feel like an errant student. And it had been a day she had been looking forward to for years now.

‘I ... ummm ... I,’ she faltered, ‘I have heard a lot about you.’

Master-da gave a short laugh. ‘Not all the legends are true,’ he said kindly. ‘But

it goes to show that our people love us and they try to drown the constant fear of our getting caught by attributing superhuman powers to us.'

He came to sit by the foot of the cot, talking pleasantly. His features flashed, catching the light of the flickering flame in the corner. He was balding, his face lean, his expression attentive, assessing. Not distinguished and yet there was something – a quiet alertness, a quality of listening. Then he jumped up. 'It's past two,' he said. 'I should get going. Mark my words: Know only those you must know – this is the golden rule in revolutionary work. Try not to speak too much with the boys I send to bring you. Excessive curiosity is not encouraged.'

His eyes had caught hers just as he turned to leave and she knew. Her skin tingled with a rush of fear and pleasure. She couldn't wait to give Priti the news. He is greater than even Doctor-da the famous terrorist of Sarat Chandra's Pather Dabi. Priti was yet to meet Master-da.

JOHN YOUNIE, MONDAY, 15 JUNE 1931

Sunday, 14 June, had brought at last the much looked for yellow envelope with its happy heartening message: the family had reached; had not only reached the port of London safely but had actually got as far as Edinburgh. His four girls were happy and very fit after the long weeks of seafaring and were now settled among their own kind, far from the mosquitoes and heat and monsoon and mildew, where the rumours and alarms that so noisily fill the Chittagong days and nights arrive only as dim, unhappy far-off echoes.

Johur hung about the table with an expectant look.

'Elspet's been calling for the ayah on the steamer,' said John looking up from the letter.

'She must have meant me,' he said. 'Though she called the ayah "ayah" she also called me by that name.'

The old man's vanity lit up his face. John did not have the heart to enlighten him that the heartless little lady had not only forgotten him, but also her very own

morning and evening daddy. After all, the constant and unfailing ayah had more claim on that infant memory.

The workers were up on the roof banging away the next morning, consequent to the rather forcible language used on Mr White following the terrific storm the previous Friday that ushered the monsoon in formally. Mr White was waiting to have a word before John left for court.

‘A large part of the roof will have to be redone ... not possible in this weather,’ he apologized. ‘I’ll have a tarpaulin stretched over the shingles for the time.’

‘It’s just as well for you, Mr White, that my bedroom roof is intact, else I would have had no compunction in handing your blinking department up to the government and refusing to pay the rent.’ John glowered as he stormed past.

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‘Grass-widowers, I admit, are perverse creatures prone to posing as martyrs on every possible occasion.’

‘This week would have to prove a blank as far as the ‘Burma’ is concerned,’ smiled Mrs Ricardo as she lined up her ball. She had taken her husband’s place on the golf course that Monday for his sciatica was worse than ever.

‘Very much an Aberdonian Shylock, where mail due to me is concerned. I take it that Dorothy, trusting as always, confided the chit, to some Marseilles scoundrel, instead of the French postal authorities.’

Mrs J rolled up and broke in on the conversation with her usual élan. ‘I have just sent off one to Dorothy. Fourteen pages, and mind you, not a word of scandal.’ She winked and dug John in the ribs.

Johnny’s ribald guffaw broke out from behind them. He pocketed his Ts and joined the little group. He had been out, all of the previous week, on the trail of the canister merchants and had returned with nothing but a sinister bundle of wire and a small collection of explosives.

‘I have to confess,’ said Mrs Ricardo apologetically, ‘that my own effort falls rather short of fourteen pages.’

‘Fourteen pages!’ laughed Johnny thumping his wife on the shoulder. ‘You, my dear, can ramble on paper as you do in conversation, but I would not risk a single anna on your assurance that there was not a word of scandal in there.’

John went to stand by the hole as Johnny prepared for the last putt of the day. Poor old Mrs J had been letting her tongue run away with her of late, with the result that a number of disgruntled memsahibs had begun to look askance at her. The trying weather had left her looking extraordinarily peaky and uncertain in temper. And Dorothy’s absence had left her without a real friend, for there were few that were willing to overlook her frequent bêtises, as the French would say, and remember her essential good-heartedness. He rejoiced silently that Dorothy and the family were settled safely in God’s own country, far from the monsoon memsahibs – the greater felines, sharp in tooth and claw.

The letter with Tilbury postmark arrived on the last Monday of June. Do you sit at night in that empty barn? She had asked. John glanced around at what had been the favourite playground of yore – the centre of the drawing room – now occupied by one of the card tables stacked high with files and books of evidence; empty cigarette tins lying about with nobody to trundle them over the floor. But there was infinite consolation to be had in the enlarged snapshot of the family that had been captured a few days before the departure.

What news could he give her in return? The old trial was progressing at a snail’s pace. He had been forced to close down for two days the previous week, as Lokenath Bal had developed vertigo and a blood pressure of 180 due to faecal impaction resulting from overeating and had to be given saline treatment. This afternoon he had become unconscious in the cage and the doctor had to be sent for. The two others had latched on to one solitary witness and he could predict that they would hang on like grim death until the week was out.

When asked as to when the case was likely to reach its end, John had taken to replying: God knows. Not infrequently, the proceedings were enlivened by back chat: The president again displays his lack of sympathy and deplorable temper. The scenes were, for most part, merely annoying but he had burst out laughing the other day when GG wound up on one of his long-winded homilies on the conduct of the proceedings by screaming that it was a simply bogus tribunal and

the president a bogus president. If the trial went on at its present rate, Dorothy would have trouble persuading the bairns that they did not have a perfectly bogus daddy.

Mondays were the best days in the week as the mornings brought in the home mail and after golf in the evening it was time to put pen to paper and continue their little conversations. There was no better tonic. It exceeded a barrel of apples, several vats of vitamins and umpteen glycerophos tablets. She would have to excuse his attempts that would soon begin to resemble the monsoon repertory of the cook – farash¹ beans and brinjal, brinjal and lady's fingers, lady's fingers and farash beans and always the inevitable mourghee. There would be the stale old tribunal, now getting stale enough in all conscience, the empty house, the weather which was now simply rain and rain and then more rain, and the daily monotonous wanderings across the sodden golf course. A bright spot though, was the Rabbit Cup tournament that was going on.

Remember, he wrote, you are the physician and I am the patient and then all will be well. It was a nice touch, very crafty and almost Chittagonian in its cunning. The first week of July had brought the Hon'ble Mr Prentice who was spending three days studying the local conditions. The financial position of the province like most other provinces in this distressful country, observed John, is parlous and as the Assam Rifles here alone cost Rs 10,000 a month, the government is beginning to wonder how long Chittagong is going to continue being a miniature volcano. The old tribunal was still plodding along – ever slowly and wearily.

A few new epithets had been thrown at him that week, with GG announcing that he had a fever and a headache and wished to go back to jail. The jail doctor had been summoned and the temperature declared normal. So when GG enquired whether he was to be allowed to go back to jail and was told the answer was in the negative he yelled: 'But how audacious and tyrannical!' The adjectives perhaps would not have sounded so inappropriate to Dorothy, he laughed. As a husband she had probably found him both. He made a mental note to put the question to her in his next letter.

The cries from the bottom of the sweeper staircase and the banging on the bathroom door roused John. It was 6 a.m. on Monday morning and Johur had to be let in. He would have liked to have hit the bed once again for another couple of hours but the glimpse of the golf course drew him to the window. The early sun smiling down and the cool morning breeze made it look very attractive.

‘Worth dragging the old carcass out of bed at this unearthly hour,’ he grunted as he fumbled for the new case of woodbines. The new cork tips were being touted as the latest sensation. He gulped at the fragrant smoke. By the way, what exactly do you mean by asking if I am lighting one cigarette after another and smoking each to its very end? He asked the absent wife. Are you suggesting that I should throw away a cigarette after I have smoked it half through?

The reward was a brief one, for the sky darkened before his eyes and what was probably going to prove the heaviest and the most prolonged of downpours that season began. By the time he was ready to go in for breakfast, the first fairway from the tee up to the road had turned into a lake and numerous pools dotted the rest of the fairways.

‘The children’s sandpit, sahib, khalaas ... washed away. The big tree ... fall any moment.’ Johur announced.

The rain had created a ravine at the back of the house, at the top of the slope just beyond the place where the children played.

‘I will have to see to it at once,’ said John, glad that the tarpaulin had kept the house dry. He picked out the much-looked-for envelope that had arrived despite the rain. The cook had come in to take the dinner order.

‘What fish do we have today?’

‘Hilsa, sir.’

‘Well then, soup, hilsa, chicken, jelly and cream and a siccun.’

‘Memsahib say siccun only when no fish and no sweet.’

John fixed the khansama with a firm eye. The golden age of the memsahib was over. His august will was not to be disputed. ‘But I like it ... achchha lagta hai.’ And I will willingly believe them to be bursting with vitamins, he chuckled to himself. He was inordinately fond of the little squares of fried bread served with an assortment of toppings that made for the second savoury served at the end of the meal right after the dessert. The word ‘seconds’ had been mangled by the tongue of the Indian cook and siccun had become an accepted part of the Raj’s fare. Dorothy had always been a delicate feeder with a healthy but small appetite whereas he was one of those lean men with a colossal appetite ... Her letter had

seized his attention: Mrs Johnny's long epistle had reached. It had proved as much an amusing read as listening to Mrs J in the flesh with its lightning jumps from one idea, one subject to another whereas he, scolded Dorothy, barely devoted anytime to local Chittagong news.

He was still laughing when he got into his car, for if there was one woman in the station who knew less than another as to what was going on it was Jean Johnson and he had never met another woman with a longer nose or longer ears for scandal and gossip – and most of it so indescribably petty. But she was incapable of making it up, so it was obviously emanating from these drawing room conclaves. There was barely any real news, with the old tribunal plodding along drearily without any new epithets hurled at him all of last week. Reluctantly, he turned his mind to the affairs of the day. It was Friday, 24 July. Some kind of a demonstration could be expected by way of celebrating the first anniversary of the court case.

‘Many happy returns, Shooter.’

The youngster had just rolled up. The rather blank look gave way to ribald laughter as John jabbed a finger at the calendar.

‘It does not seem unlikely that we may be handed a long list of defence witnesses, in which case the end is assuredly many moons off. I have given up trying to forecast.’

‘Bose was telling me that he did not think the end would come before Xmas,’ said Shooter.

‘Well, he is in a better position to make a forecast, isn't he?’ said John bitterly. He had long resigned himself to the fact that he was no clairvoyant and had been nursing the futile hope that they might finish before the beginning of the civil court vacation, which would have made it mighty convenient to tack on a spot of Blighty leave. The infernal tribunal permitted only executive holidays – a miserable fortnight.

A gloved steward came in with an envelope on a silver salver. It was a chit from Reid, the chief secretary, to say that he should go to Dinajpur Darjeeling as judge after the vacation and Lethbridge, who was currently on leave, would take on Chittagong. This posed a problem. He was desperate for a bit of home leave and yet didn't want to risk losing the Darjeeling billet. Lethbridge, who was senior,

could easily be diverted to Darjeeling but, he told himself philosophically, there was no point agonizing. No point in making plans or forecasts until the end of the present trek was in sight. Even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea and so, in the meantime, convict JY was condemned by malign fate to solitary confinement living from one Monday to another.

Major Taitt had won the Rabbit's Cup and had asked John to dine with them on Monday. He liked the Taitts and their parties but he wished they would choose any day of the week but Monday. The previous one, 27 July, had been marred by the tragedy at Alipore court when a young man in the audience stood up and shot dead R.R. Garlick, district and sessions judge of Alipore. The assassin had been overpowered but had succeeded in popping a cyanide pill. A letter, recovered from his pocket and signed by Bimal Dasgupta, stated that the act was in revenge for the unjust hanging of Dinesh Gupta. But Bimal's father denied it was his son's body and the police had advertised a reward of Rs 500/- for anyone who could identify the murderer.² The situation would have to be discussed with Dorothy, for she was likely to get anxious at a time when it was not at all good for her and before Mrs J, though he had his doubts that she even knew, sent in her typically misleading garbled version. The grim truth was that he too had received a rather crudely worded, threatening letter. A bit of bluff, he was inclined to believe, aimed at damaging the morale but all possible precautions were being taken. In addition to the escort, a sergeant had begun accompanying him to court and he kept his large, fat Webley lying on the box beside him in the car. Security had been tightened at court and a police guard remained on duty, round the clock at the house, in order to ensure that nobody ran upstairs and deposited a neat little time machine under the pillow or in the dirty linen basket. A great idea, he agreed, bump the master off and the trial would have to begin all over again. This was another scare, much like the one last April when Dorothy had so shrewdly observed that if one were to go about every day, filled with all sorts of gloomy imaginings, one would rapidly become pathological. But now it was most important for her to remember not to panic.

But the still more recent development that John was worried about had taken place on 1 August. No less than twenty of the accused had intimated that they were giving up their lawyers and were going to remain undefended. It was an exceedingly crafty move for it meant that if a single one of them became ill and was unable to be present in court they would have to shut down for the day. These days, hardly a day passed when two or three of them were absent from flu or some other kind of indisposition but the proceedings carried on in the

presence of their representative pleaders. Now it was a matter of certainty that one or the other would be sick every other day – heaven only knew when it would become possible to ring the curtain on this endless farce.

RAM KRISHNA BISWAS, 4 AUGUST 1931

It was still dark, dawn a long way off; the guards opened the cell door. A team of senior officers stood outside. His hands fumbled as he tried to put his spectacles on. A pair of hands reached out and gently removed them. The meaning was not lost upon Ram Krishna. His face was flushed with the fever that had raged since the last couple of days, but otherwise remained calm and serene. He followed silently.

‘Bande Mataram!’ Ram Krishna called out as loud as he could.

The inmates scrambled from their beds, aghast. The hanging was over.

‘Bande Mataram! Shaheed Ram Krishna Ki Jai!’ Alipore Central Jail, Calcutta, vibrated with the sounds of their voices.

ELEVEN

JOHN YOUNIE

John swished his whisky sheepishly around the glass, as the padre expanded on the number of haloes he had had made for all those in the station who were so good that they had no need to go to church.

‘The Presbyterians ... I cannot really expect them, but I am definitely vexed and disappointed with the shortcomings of my Anglican flock.’ The diminutive padre jutted his chin upwards and fixed him with a firm eye.

It was a pleasant relief to have him drawn away by their hostess. Mrs Taitt always succeeded in laying on cheery dinner parties with vingt-et-un afterwards.

‘I hear the padre’s stock has slumped considerably and the church is emptier than ever.’ Mrs Ricardo leaned across to whisper in his ear.

‘Well,’ John’s eyebrows shot up in mock righteousness, ‘his recent policy of tackling people individually and demanding their reasons for non-attendance at church has not exactly gone down well with the Chittagonians. In fact, I have heard a good number complain that he has been driving them away with his tactics.’

‘It is such an easy and stupid excuse to blame the padre for one’s own shortcomings.’ She narrowed her eyes accusingly.

‘So I plead guilty,’ laughed John.

‘And when is the little nipper arriving?’

‘Ah! And we already have Mary suggesting it was time to throw Elspet away.’

Mrs R burst into giggles. ‘They are so precious! Why, the other day I was

mentioning to Bunty that Helen was going to get a baby brother and to my surprise she put the question, “Will it be Christian?” Amazing, isn’t it?’

Their charming young hostess had joined them. ‘How did it go with the padre?’ she winked. ‘I was telling my husband about the potluck at the Johnsons’ last Wednesday and how the conversation went from the padre to religion in general, and how a certain someone had much to say.’

‘To which your dear shrewd husband said ...?’

‘My dear, haven’t you realized by this time that Mr Younie dearly loves an argument?’

‘Alas,’ sighed John. ‘I too know one dear lady who will wholeheartedly agree with that comment.’ He would have to remember to get Dorothy to send a copy of The World of the New Testament by T.R. Glover. That ought to cheer the padre up a bit.

People had quite naturally been on the alert the previous week as the Chandpur murderer had been executed in Calcutta. He belonged to Chittagong and was one of the absconders in the raid case. His brother was still at large with a bounty of Rs 1,000/- on his head. Little progress had been made at the trial. The investigating officer had been cross-examined the whole week by Mr Ghoshal and the time had not yet come for the trio to begin on him. A pleader who had called to see him in the morning had said that they were intent on taking fifteen days each and that a long list of defence witnesses had been prepared. One thing that was certain now was that there was no chance of finishing before the civil court vacation began. He would once again be cheated of his holiday. Nor was the weather inclined to be fair. The dull monsoon-y days had brought with them floods on the Ganges and Brahmaputra delaying the steamers and with them the morning dak.

12 AUGUST 1931

Johur placed the chota hazri tray on the bedside table. Two telegrams occupied

the pride of place: one a brick-red colour which usually held foreign cables – usually some dull official matter – and the second quite definitely addressed to Younie but of pale-orange colour, which could also turn out to be a matter for the office. It could be just a hunch, but perhaps it had come all the way across the seas. He picked it up but hesitated in ripping it open. For about half a minute he speculated, picking off one by one the heads of an imaginary grass, muttering darkly: boy, girl, boy, girl and then said to himself triumphantly – it simply must be a boy – as the paperknife sliced through. And Glory Be it was. Not that he would have wept nor, after the fashion of the ancient patriarchs, turned his face to the wall but he was also certain as to what Dorothy's first question to old Howd, professor of gynaecology and obstetrics, had been.

The first call of the day was made to Mrs Johnson and a round of golf fixed. And as he had expected, by the time he reached the first tee at five o'clock, all Chittagong had been told. Since then it had been a deluge of congratulations and he was grateful that no one had added many happy returns or words to that effect.

'My word! Hasn't she been clever!' added Mrs Martin to the usual felicitations, who for obvious reasons despite her umpteen years of married life still retained in her make-up a great deal of the acidulated spinster.

'I don't know if Dorothy had been very clever, my dear,' he chuckled, 'but I do know that "le bon dieu" has been very kind to us.'

The round of golf had given way to several rounds of drinks. 'I wonder,' said the padre suggestively, 'if anyone has noticed the judge's chic taste in pyjamas hanging over the sill of the northern window?'

'You are positive, padre, they belong to me?' asked John naively. That effectively stopped him from enlarging on the topic as Mrs J chortled delightedly and the rest laughed uproariously. The judge's new pyjamas, though a trifle feminine, were the coolest and the most comfortable he had had in a long time.

The announcement in the Statesman brought in letters, both of them characteristic, from Donovan and Ramsbotham. The former pointed out: You or Dorothy or both of you owe me a letter so I am not going to write much and in the same breath suggested that the new arrival be named John Ananta Younie and hoped he would not be spoilt by his numerous sisters and never saddled with

a job as rotten as his father's. Ramsbotham's letter, written from a hilltop in Missouri was just as impudent: Congratulations on the acquisition of a son. With his timely and convenient arrival he will be able to continue the hearing of the Chittagong case after his old man retires and with some judicious handling the case might become a hereditary profession for all concerned. The 12th is a good day; he will always have it in the holidays and perhaps eat a grouse of his own killing.

Thank you for your valuable suggestion, wrote John in reply. I propose recommending to the government the formation of a small hereditary cadre, with special pay and shall name the nipper Lokanantagan so as to warrant his early admission into the said cadre. It was sure to bring on a cascade of ribald comments, ones he would have to refrain from passing on to Dorothy.

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Cassells's lucky escape was in the newspapers. He had been overworking himself as usual for the benefit of the poor raiyats in the flooded area of the Mymensingh district where the heavy rains had added enormously to the distress caused by the collapse of the jute market. At 7.30 p.m. he was entering a cooperative bank with the purpose of obtaining agricultural loans for the sufferers at reduced rates when a youth came forward with something in his hand. Thinking it was a petition, Cassells stretched out his hand whereupon the wretched youth fired at him. Fortunately, the bullet hit a bunch of keys that Cassells had in his pocket and this, they said, deflected the bullet which broke to bits against the thigh bone. It was reported that his condition was satisfactory and that the bone had not fractured but he was being removed to Calcutta for the necessary surgeries. All things considered, he had had a providential escape but would have to go on leave.

Cassells, as collector at Rajshahi, had been John's first boss in India. It was he who had introduced him to the real India. A genuinely nice Scotsman, then thirty-two years of age, who had asked this understudy to chum with him in his bungalow.

Everything had been so very new then, including the endless days of brilliant sunshine which made him inclined to say, and here's another glorious day, as he got out of bed. To which Cassells would smile and say: and what did you expect? The jail in Rajshahi, one of the six big penitentiaries in the province, had at that time some 800 to 1,000 inmates – a bright lot of rascals, starting from the life-sentence murderer and dacoit, down to the petty thieves serving fifteen hard days. They came from all over the province, the ordinary Bengali, the oblique-eyed semi-Burman from Chittagong, the Chinese-looking hill man, the black aboriginal Santhal and a few stalwart fair-complexioned Baluchis and Kabulis belonging to a regiment that had mutinied in Rangoon. The convicts stood in line, like Tommies at a kit inspection, each with their two polished tin plates and their blankets folded and set in front of them. As the officers drew near, a convict warder would strike a warning on a circle of bell metal shouting: Sarkar, salaam, asbar; which meant, the boss is coming, salute, as-you-were. Asbar¹ was the native rendering of the English command as-you-were. Crowds of these low-class convicts had then been sent off to Mesopotamia to act as camp followers and work as sweepers, porters, etc. On their return, they had become free citizens.

In one interesting corner there had been a little batch of political prisoners, the first that John had encountered. Their youthful and misguided enthusiasm had ended for the time being in the silence of the cell. Their agitation had been answered by the government in the order for internment of that poisonous creature Mrs Besant. Most of what they had to say had been mere wordy froth, a wearisome repetition of the catch phrases of the advanced political life of the West. Whereas the older, wiser and more responsible Indian recognized the necessity of slow advance, for India still had large populations living in the Palaeolithic era as far as social circumstances were concerned and barely one per cent of its population was literate; the wordy Bengali with his lust for talk and his use of political phrases, as if they were coins and not counters, ignored the logic of the facts.

Mr Farmer, of the police service, had been in the IARO² in those days and had been making his rounds of the districts, trying to raise a Bengali regiment. He had had little luck, for Bengalis have no fighting tradition and prefer the pen to the sword. And despite the fact that their population equalled that of Great Britain, all that Farmer had succeeded in getting together was some 1,300 men whereas Punjab, with half their number, had provided 15,000 recruits the previous year.

But Cassells had also taken him to see the real India, trips that John enjoyed greatly. It was here that he had met the raiyats, the hard-working sons of the soil, poor, ignorant and simple, knowing nothing and caring less about the world outside their little villages. They had changed little in all these years – remaining devoid of interests beyond the rearing of their crops and their families and the filling of their bellies from day to day. His lot is neither hard nor miserable, Cassells would say. He feeds on homely joys, eating the rugged produce of the fields around and picks out of the dust and dandles with foolish transports of affection, a paltry naked baby he recognizes as his own. When day ends, he will walk home from the fields singing; his song is neither spirited nor gay but holds within it a note of temperate gladness which strikes its long-drawn cadences, which is not out of keeping with the tranquil glory of the evening and the setting sun. Such was and continues to be 90 per cent of India's population.

The trial was moving at its usual snail's pace with the occasional breezes. A short while ago, John had been written off as completely bogus; now it seemed that chameleon would be the appropriate description. Another petition had been filed. It happened with unfailing regularity every time he turned down an objection from the monkey's cage.

... the President did this, that and the other ... turned red with rage ... with red eyes and so forth. I expect, he had addressed the court, to see in due course purple-with-passion; white-with-anger; green-with-envy, yellow-with-fear; blue-with-cold and perhaps also polychromatic-with-mixed emotions.

The press box had tittered as had a few members of the audience. He sat on his verandah now, watching the players on the golf course. The Captain's Cup was in progress. He had played his prescribed eighteen holes off the previous day and had ended up going to pieces. 'Dorothy could have watched the tournament from here,' he said absently.

Johnny appeared not to have heard. He had joined him on the verandah but the game seemed to have lost its grip on him. 'I have written to the government,' he said in a plaintive voice. 'I ask myself, how long are we going to do this. Surjya Sen can wait and he knows the longer he waits the better are his chances of success. He also knows that the police have been under strain for well over a year and must show signs of fatigue and slacken their vigilance. He knows that the human element is what he can count on to give way somewhere and thus give him his chance.'

John looked at his friend sympathetically. He was no longer his usual cock-a-hoop self. Chittagong did that to you. He let his mind drift off far from Johnny and his woes.

Cassells and he, cruising through the river system at Atrai, on Rabindranath Tagore's³ houseboat. It had been not just an ordinary inspection. Their chief aim had been to supervise the precautions taken to prevent looting at the haats. Tents had been sent on ahead to be pitched at various halting places and the bundobust had been perfect. They had glided along slowly, for there was no current in those rivers, the crew sometimes rowing and sometimes towing them along the bank. Touring by river was far less strenuous than touring on horseback and had a charm all of its own – floating, always floating, with never a ripple in the heat of the noonday through endless fields of paddy stubble, dotted here and there by tiny villages where the patient oxen trod out the grain on the threshing floors and the women plied the winnowing fans. In the coolness of the evening, the setting sun set the eastern sky on fire, away beyond the distant palm trees and in the stillness of the night, the moon turned the muddy waters into ribbons of silver that wound through an eerie land of mist and silence.

One of their jobs had been to maintain and recheck every now and then the permanent record of rights which was a record of the land held by each landlord and each tenant. To begin with, one had to make a map of the district. The sun-bleached paddy stretched before you, one plot separated from another not by fences, for these were unknown in India, but by little ridges of earth called aals. One surveyed one's district; divided it up mentally into little sections, each comprising a thousand to three thousand fields; and then made a map of each section. For this, one had to turn his gang of amins, or surveyors, adrift. With Davis, the other youngster training with him, he would ride out accompanied by the kanungo, who was the man in charge of the amins, checking for accuracy. Cultivators of every plot were interviewed and the details of the landowner, the names of the current tenants and the portion they tilled recorded on a form called the khatian. Then the two junior sahibs would begin on the tough part: ascertaining the precision with which the job had been done. If you went out and stood in the middle of a field and asked whose it was, you would be mightily surprised if half a dozen cultivators did not step out and calmly claim the land as their own. It is not the Bengali's ignorance of the meaning of truth, Cassells had taught. It is due to the prevalence of the joint family system. Families lived together – parents, grandparents, sons and their wives, daughters and often their husbands! When a man died, his land was divided amongst his children but it

would continue to be farmed as one unit. Then came the clauses under the Bengal Tenancy Act which is one of the most complicated and voluminous legal enactments available.

The old days made him nostalgic. It was during the time spent with Cassells that Davis and he had passed their departmental exams and become first-class magistrates with the power to present malefactors with one year imprisonment or a fine up to Rs 1,000/-! But dressed as they did in those days – khaki shorts and shirt – they never did quite enjoy the dignity that went with the bench.

The players were preparing for the last putt of the day. John broke out of his deliberations and rose to join the crowd on the course. Johnny was too far lost in his thoughts. He responded to the nudge and followed mechanically.

HARIPADA BHATTACHARYA, 30 AUGUST 1931

On the polo maidan, the finals of a football tournament was in progress. The vice-president of the Town Club, Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla, was under the shamiana, surrounded by friends and his armed escort. Sub-inspector Siddique Dewan, the Khan Bahadur's blue-eyed boy, was the captain of the team expected to win and the one Ahsanulla rooted for. The game was fast and furious, and under the shamiana the audience gripped the handles of their chairs and lifted themselves practically off their seats.

A rope ran around the edge of the field that kept the excited crowds clear of the playing area. They screamed and jostled amongst themselves, cheering the teams they favoured. It was impossible to keep the football-crazy Bengali away from a game. They had been following the series ever since they had begun braving the rabid security guards that pounced on every youth, especially the city lads, and strip-searched them out in the open. Today's had been especially rigorous but that was the least of their concerns for it was the culmination of all the games played since the beginning of the month. Come rain or shine, the crowd was going to be present.

A village boy, perhaps not even in his teens, his face caked with dirt, a great

black umbrella hanging by the end of its handle from the front of his tattered shirt, cheered vigorously. Little Haripada had attended all the matches. The field erupted in cheers of joy as members of the victorious team jumped up and down hugging each other. Hip hip hurray! The cry rang through the field and was taken up by the crowds. The people in the shamiana had leapt to their feet, congratulating the Khan Bahadur. Siddique Dewan came forward to accept the trophy and it was passed from hand to hand round the winning team. Haripada slipped out and made his way to where the official cars stood waiting. He had been here the previous day and knew that the first to march off the field would be the body of armed police that had been present on duty every day since the series began.

The boy jumped up and down in glee as he spied the Khan Bahadur appear at the exit gate. The players holding the cup high in the air were by his side. 'Here you. Ja.' The uniformed driver's blow caught him smartly on the ear. Haripada moved a little way off but then caught up by the mood of the moment, ran forward to gawk at the winning team.

'This is for you, Parul,' he whispered.

JOHN YOUNIE

Sunday afternoon, a leisurely round of golf with Jean Johnson, and the two had joined the group on the club lawns discussing the sunset and the prospects of a storm. It was around 6.30 p.m. when the news came: somebody had been shot on the polo maidan. Kemm, Johnny and Taitt dashed off to investigate.

In a little while they were back. Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla, inspector of police and J's right-hand man throughout the past year had been bumped off.

'The old Khan Bahadur had been congratulating the members of the winning team when a youth stepped forward and pumped five shots into his back. He survived for only half an hour,' Kemm was saying. 'Fortunately, the murderer, a miserable youth of fifteen or so, was caught.'

Everyone was aghast. Most had attended the tea party on 4 July to congratulate Ahsanulla on the Khan Bahadurship conferred on him at the Birthday Honours.

‘And no honour was better deserved.’ Johnny looked as if he had been dealt a crushing blow.

Most of the work had fallen on him and on one other Mohammedan officer: investigation of the raid case, the endless work of discovering and checkmating the continuous plots for the dirty work that had been hatched since.

‘In the midst of so much treachery and faint-heartedness there were two men on whom I could rely to the last ditch and he was one of them. Twenty-six years of police work behind him; intensely hardworking ... he was true to his salt. And the pity of it is that he had some six months to go before he earned his pension.’

‘The cowardly scoundrels who sent this misguided schoolboy to murder him have little foreseen the storm that is bound to arise,’ said Kemm in a grim voice. ‘The Khan Bahadur was extremely popular and influential among the Mussalman community.’

Heaven only knows, said John to himself, what will happen out in the mofussil where the M’s outnumber the H’s by something like nine to one.

HARIPADA BHATTACHARYA

A stone aimed by Sub-inspector Siddique Dewan got him in the face as he ran along the railway track with the footballers and the police at his heels. His threat to shoot at them had been in vain, for they were like man-eaters that had tasted blood. Stunned, Haripada sank to the ground, his hand clutching at the eye socket. Blood oozed from between his fingers. And something new, white and gel-like. The howling mob was upon him in seconds. There was little that he registered, mostly: the white shoes flashing, getting thrown against the uneven rocks that bore into his flesh with a vengeance, knuckles crashing against his teeth, choking on his blood, wondering if he would be able to draw breath before the next blow.

I may have to lose you, Master-da had said. Let life go, Haripada; even that is better than letting Ahsanulla get away.

A rib cracked, sounding like a miniature explosion. His body was breaking up.

It was still dark. The first rays of the new morning had not yet touched the buds. Haripada had given the hibiscus and the champa a good shake. The flowers came floating down. The sounds of the Tanpura strings being plucked came from next door. Parul was about to begin her morning riyaz. He reached out for the flowers that still stuck fast to the trees, putting them into his little basket. To collect the floral offering he had woken early and bathed, a ritual he participated in religiously ever since his father had entrusted him with the task. He would now go sit by his father's side and together offer the blooms one by one, chanting the goddess's mantras. There would be enough left over in the basket for his mother once they were done.

Durgam giri, kantar moru, dustar parabar

Longhitey hobey ratri nishithey jatrira hushiyar

High mountains, endless deserts, uncontrollable seas

Cross you will have to in the dead of the night, oh traveller, be

alert.

Parul's voice was clear and sweet. Haripada stopped to listen. It was something he had done often ever since she had started her singing lessons ten years ago. They had been children together, Parul and he, but now in the bloom of youth she shied away. The companion of his boyhood had grown into a lovely young woman with rich dark hair that cascaded down her back. Her father was looking for a suitable groom and soon she would be gone.

A sudden silence and then the screaming began. There were men, many men

yelling at the top of their voices, crashing about the house, flinging pieces of the instruments out of the window. Haripada ran to the door. Others had come running.

Police. It's the police. They screamed and then stood dumbstruck as Parul's father was dragged out and hurled on to the courtyard. The constables struck at him with their lathis as he flailed about. More emerged, dragging Parul's little brothers.

Teach them so they will never forget.

Haripada would never forget. A tall powerfully built man stood in the doorway. Ahsanulla, he gasped.

Singing is forbidden. Kazi Nazrul is forbidden. Ahsanulla shrieked at the assembled villagers. He moved aside to let his men pass. Parul's mother was being dragged out by her hair.

You, murderers, let me go, she sobbed. They have killed my child. She rolled on the ground stretching her hand out in appeal towards the gaping crowd. They have killed her.

KALPANA DUTT

The maid took a quick look over her shoulder. A loose tongue was frowned upon. She knelt by the side of the bed and reached out to massage Kalpana's feet.

'They say it was the district magistrate himself. He and the police superintendent and other very senior people. All white. They broke the press with their hammers at the office of the Panchojanya and beat up the night staff. That is why no paper today.'

That was why there was no college either and the reason no one was being permitted out of their homes. The main door and the gates had been shut and the guards handed arms from her father's personal armoury. He had taken out his

revolver and loaded it. The news had spread like wildfire. The boy had got his target. Though her Baba hadn't said a word, she knew that in his heart he believed that this was too good an occasion for the British to pass up. This was the time to exploit the intrinsic Indian weakness and engineer communal riots.

'No more than a boy – so fresh, so beautiful. Fair with rosy cheeks ... you will not believe it unless you have seen him, didimoni. But so cruelly they have beaten him,' the maid clicked her tongue in sorrow. 'And through the night,' she added in a hushed whisper, 'they have dragged people, mainly boys, to the Kotwali and whipped them. College professor, teacher ... no respect at all. Nearly 700 or 800 of them ... everyone beaten, cursed through the night. So many have broken bones, lost their eyes ...'

Ahsanulla had got what he deserved. The terrible stories of torture inflicted upon Ambika-da had incensed the people. Oblivious to the fact that the poor man was at death's door, desperately ill and coughing up blood, the police had shown him little mercy. Graphic accounts had passed around of how Ahsanulla had personally kicked him in the mouth shattering his teeth, in the abdomen so that he began peeing blood and when the bleeding man begged for some water, opened his pants to urinate over his face. Death! That is what he deserved, she muttered, hatred clouding her face. He was nothing but filth dragging his armed escort everywhere even to the kothas of Reazuddin Bazaar. They were despicable – the police. Men who had failed in every other vocation found their place in the Bengal Police Service. She had not forgotten the story of how Charles Dickens's son had wound up in the Bengal Police after having failed miserably at everything he had tried his hand at. These were the dregs of society, with little or no education, who would find it hard to make an honest living were it not for this one service.

But since early that morning, Chittagong was threatening to boil over. Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla's body lay heavily guarded on the banks of the Lal Dighi and had drawn huge crowds. The ASP, Mr Shooter, accompanied by several white officials and their Indian lackeys had put the coffin up for display and made several inflammatory rabble-rousing speeches. The district magistrate had himself called out to God to find peace for friend Ahsanulla's soul.

Screams and sounds of people running down the street came to their ears. Both the girls crouched instinctively as a stone smashed in a windowpane. It wasn't the one in Kalpana's bedroom. The maid relinquished the vice-like hold she had

on Kalpana's toes. Rubbing them apologetically, the girl blew on them as if to soothe a child.

'That didn't take long,' thought Kalpana, peeping through the window. The glow in the sky signified the end. The looting and ransacking that had been taking place in the posh city centre where prominent Hindu families owned large shops and showrooms had come to an end. The showrooms that lined the Rajpath as it wound its way through Andarkilla all the way to Lomaar Bazaar, had been set ablaze. Black smoke spiralled across.

'The chowkidars said that the local goons had all been called to the thana early this morning and constables were moving about in carriages making announcements that Hindu shops are going to be looted,' whispered the maid.

So the city had been handed over to the goons for a prescribed number of hours. On the face of it, it would appear to be communal violence. Divide and rule – the dictum served the British well.

JOHN YOUNIE

He held a snapshot of the girls, as he lay down in Helen's old bed. Court had been declared closed as a token of respect. Not a single Hindu clerk had turned up. Johnny and Kemm had been busy running around all day, striving to keep the Mussalmans from getting completely out of hand, for the Khan Bahadur had been an extremely popular fellow. Something like 5,000 Muslims had turned up for the funeral and any Hindu who put his nose outdoors got hammered. There had been looting galore and several of the bazaars had been cleaned out, end to end. Kemm had ordered a curfew: everyone to be indoors by 7.30 p.m., for the fear was that the wholesale looting that had taken place during the daylight hours would be followed by wholesale murder during the hours of darkness. One could only wonder about what was happening out in the mofussil. With the police otherwise engaged, the tribunal would have to remain closed.

With Major Woods and Colonel Buckland taking stock of the situation, patrols out all over the town and the number of troops in station it was unlikely to turn

into another Cawnpore.

Donovan was incarcerated in his bungalow, for the terrorists were out to get him and the government was now in a hurry to send him out of Barisal. For some years now the vernacular press had been after him dubbing him a worthy successor of the Bloody Blandy of Kulkati fame. Soon he would be on the high seas, lucky man, headed Blighty-wards. Cassells was getting along nicely and would soon be home on disability leave. John let himself drift to another world where Chittagong was but a faint unhappy distant echo and the only real figures of a nightmare world were the ones that surrounded little Peter's cot. The days were growing shorter with the dark setting in early. The girls would be turning in about now, being tucked away for the night at the other end of the world. They were away, far away in a pleasant land where the sun gently cherished and did not scorch. He still found it difficult to conjure up visions of the little stranger who had entered their lives and eagerly awaited that day of sunshine when Dorothy would take the promised photograph of the roaring nikumma.

HARIPADA BHATTACHARYA

Three launches carrying about a hundred Gurkhas of the Eastern Frontier Rifles crossed over to the far bank of the Karnaphuli. Haripada had regained consciousness at the Kotwali but the electric switch had put him out for the rest of the morning. He was now stumbling along with Mr Shooter pulling on the rope that went round his waist. With the handcuffs in place and the grossly swollen eyelids, he found it impossible to keep his balance and fell down repeatedly. If he held his head at a particular angle, he could just about see the soldiers marching on either side, their bayonets fixed and ready. The cries of the onlookers, the raucous announcements, the sound of marching boots ... the noise hammered away at his brain. His head was being steadied, the eyelids being pried apart. The intense sunlight burned its way in. The crowd made a startled 'oh' sound. A woman screamed. They were peering into the ulcerating socket. Haripada struggled to peer out of the good eye. It seemed to be a village haat. He had lost count of the miles he had walked and the number of times he had picked himself up with a little help from a well-positioned boot.

‘Murderers will get no respite.’ He could recognize Shooter’s voice now, hoarse with yelling. A hand grabbed him by the hair and pulled him into an upright position. ‘This child thought we would simply hang him. But we will flay him first.’

The blow caught him in the solar plexus and the wind rushed out of his lungs in a single gust. He tried to breathe through the curtain of mucus and saliva that hung from his nose and mouth. A boot connected with his buttock but he made not a sound, unable as he was to summon enough air to howl. Ripping out of the grasp that held him by the hair, he hurtled forward landing on all fours. Then began the systematic thump thump thump of batons and boots striking flesh and bone and the synchronized gasping of the crowd.

A bucket of water sloshed over his face. It was time to move on. To the next village, to the next haat, before every crowd that was willing to watch. A sergeant gripped him by the scruff of his neck and drove him forward. He vomited and doubled over. But Shooter was in no hurry to end his day.

Lists were produced at every school visited. It held the names of students suspected to be sympathizers. They were lined up right in front and the rest of the school and its teachers made to stand and watch.

Shooter spoke in Hindi. ‘Look. Murder is not forgiven; this child has killed the Khan Bahadur. The British government is far too strong. You cannot kill each one individually. Even together you cannot achieve anything. Surjya Sen will soon be caught. We know which ones amongst you have joined the revolutionary societies ... this is the last warning.’

He walked among the rows scrutinizing the faces: here a slap, there an ear being tweaked.

‘You, over there. Fifty sit-ups.’

Boys were down on their haunches holding their ears, doing sit-ups supervised by the white sergeants or running laps of their football fields.

But at Saroatali School, the one in which Shaheed Ram Krishna and Tarakeshwar Dastidar had once been students, Shooter felt that the lesson needed to be driven home.

‘Say it. Down with Surjya Sen! Louder! I cannot hear.’ Bayonet ends helped elicit the voices. A select few were strung upside down and given a taste of the lash. Demonstrations were given on Haripada and they continued even as he was clouding over.

The principal was struggling to shield him. ‘No, no, please stop.’ A blow caught him on the side of the head making him reel. The second one laid the elderly man on the ground.

Screaming people were being dragged out of their homes and beaten. Saroatali, the abode of the shaheed was being left behind in flames. The night’s march carried on, leaving a trail of fire and smoke.

Something hot slammed into him from behind. Haripada convulsed into wakefulness. His eyelids were being held open. A red mouth agape, the two upper incisors missing, was screaming into his face. The clout made a crack and the head whipped around. They let go of the mass of hair and the ground lurched. The heap at his feet was his mother.

‘Why has your son committed murder? Why did you not control him?’

The screaming rammed into his head like a screwdriver. The air was scalding and thick. A glow penetrated through the puffy flesh around his eyes. If he tilted his head a little more he would perhaps get a glimpse. The crackling belonged to the hollow bamboo as they exploded into flames. The inferno was once their home. His father stood tied to a post beside it.

He was being dragged away; the night’s work had been done. He screwed his neck around for one last look: the man struggling at his post. Nirmal-da had prepared him well. Haripada’s hands were never known to shake. But Nirmal-da had overlooked this bit.

Fire flew from the blaze with a resounding crash obscuring the figure from view. The mud walls had given way and lost their hold on the flaming tin roof.⁴

TWELVE

ANANTA LAL SINGH, MONDAY, 7 AUGUST 1931

He was being let out of his cell after a whole week. The only person he had spoken to during this time had been Hicks, the special superintendent and jail super.

‘See how the people are enraged at the loss of their beloved Khan Bahadur.’ He shook his head sorrowfully as if speaking to a retarded child. ‘Riot, arson. Within two hours the Hindus of Chittagong have lost more than fifty lakh worth of property. Now it is quiet.’

He pretended not to have heard. Everyone was aware as to who it was that had engineered the riots. Pick your battles, he reminded himself and walked to his van.

The routine had not varied much and they were soon together inside the monkey cage. They had been starved of news all week, for not even the sipahis had been willing to talk. The boys out on bail carried the news: Haripada’s superb performance; how the plan initially involved Shaileshwar Chakraborty, Binod Dutt and Sushil De who were supposed to have lobbed hand bombs at the crowd to give Haripada the chance to enter the ring that surrounded Ahsanulla; how on four successive days the boys had gone prepared but found no suitable opportunity, and finally Haripada had opted to carry it out all by himself and the terrible torture he had had to endure thereafter. Many of those out on bail had been rounded up on that first night and thrashed.

The courtroom was subdued, an undercurrent of anger and hostility sweeping the room, touching every man present with incredible sadness. Whether it was the lawyers, the members of the audience or the press, no one had escaped public humiliation.

There was sad news to follow. Kalarpol Shaheed Monoranjan Sen’s old father

had been trampled under Sergeant Kelly's boots for trying to save his youngest from the police. Spare him please, he had begged. He is just a schoolboy. The pleadings had fallen on deaf ears and the father, a pleader of this very court, had paid with his life. There were many in the audience and the press box that sat glum and sullen. The privacy of their homes had been breached, their sons dragged to the Kotwali for lessons in discipline and their daughters manhandled. Veils and ghomtas had been pulled off; long hair tugged at; bodies searched by the hands of lascivious men on the lookout for Surjya Sen. Close to a thousand homes had been subjected to such indignity.

'Look at these. My parents, brothers and sisters ... no one was spared ... and you did not trust me.' The boy had come up to him and was showing off the black-and-blue welts.

'True, we did not trust you earlier,' Ananta replied.

'And now?'

'Maybe I could now.'

'And if now I turn out to be a spy?'

'Then I will know I was right all along.'

This was the boy who had been caught corresponding with an agent just before the raid. The chance discovery had led to counter-tactics to keep both the police and the agent confused. He had been invited to inner-circle meetings and made responsible for distributing the fake pamphlets the day before the raid.

He had been a useful stooge, but why had he been caught and beaten now? Was it because they felt he had deliberately misled them or was this a trap? Get the undertrials to sympathize with him so that he could worm his way back into the inner circle and continue to feed the police as before?

Deshpriya Jatindra Mohan Sengupta had arrived in Chittagong with Deshpran Biren Sasmal, Nripen Banerjee, Maulana Akram Khan and Maulvi Afsar-ud-din Choudhury. When Gandhi-ji himself had not a word for Bhagat Singh, why had these Gandhians come?

JOHN YOUNIE, 14 SEPTEMBER 1931

After a week of golf and quiet evenings at home John was grateful that work had resumed. Mondays were back to being what they were and he could now concentrate on his letter, comforted in the knowledge that somehow the case was progressing.

Did I tell you that we have a new civil surgeon, a Major Kapur, a Punjabi with a French wife (she is in France at the moment with her two daughters)? He joined here some weeks ago. I had not run across him before but I called on him and discovered him to be very good fellow. White mentioned to Taitt and myself in the billiard room a short time ago that he (Major Kapur) had asked Nelson (commissioner) and Kemm (collector and district magistrate) to put him up for the club and they had promised to do so but that nothing had come out of it and he (Kapur) was very piqued about it. Taitt and I therefore agreed to propose and second him and in order to prevent any possible black-balling, I had the matter brought up at the last meeting of the club committee, of which I now am a member, and we let it be known that as a committee we were unanimously in favour of admitting him. The result was that he went through without difficulty. I understand he is very fed up that after he had asked Nelson and Kemm to put him up and they had promised to do so, they took no steps in the matter. It looks to me as if they did not wish to incur any possible risk of odium in proposing an Indian in these days when the atmosphere is so sweet and racial tension and hatred has never been so imperceptible. Apparently, they did not know that Indians have been elected members of the club before and that there is no animus whatever against people of the standing and type of Kapur. I believe he will be quite popular; plays a very good game of tennis and is a keen bridgeite. To exclude a man like this in these days is, I think, a very great mistake. He has no friends here and does not mix at all with the local babus – and to refuse to admit him to our social centre would be to alienate one of our best friends. After all, in these days there are so few Indians that are not tainted by the prevailing miasma of hatred. Looked at too from the rather low point of view of self interest, it is bad policy to make a social enemy of one's medical adviser. I must say I have little patience with the point of view of the average British in these matters. I have not much use for the Aryan brother in the mass – but when one

comes along with his heart in the right place, by all means do everything in one's power to keep him in the right camp and his feet in the right path.

Craig, the IG, came on Saturday and will be here looking into things. The Hindu rags are loudly yapping that the executive authorities stood by and observed a masterly inactivity while the M's looted and robbed the H's. All nonsense of course – but there it is – with a Congress committee of enquiry and all these pestilential rags demanding Kemm and J's heads on chargers. There is no acknowledgement of the obvious fact that by persistent harbourage and concealment of the absconders, by tacit approval of terrorist methods and by constant eulogy of assassins, the H's have been for months steadily and assiduously sowing the wind and have only themselves to blame.

Be sure to tell Mary that Daddy is delighted to find Helen is not the only one who can produce such lovely pictures for the walls of his big and rather empty house.

The British newspapers however were loathe to stick with John's restrained accounts which he claimed were authentic. Dorothy's letter soon arrived with its frantic enquiries. She referred to an article which claimed that the damage was estimated at more than £800,000s; that an attempt had been made to loot the Mahalaxmi Bank; that many persons were injured, including a Hindu senior deputy magistrate who was stoned by the Moslems.¹

That the aftermath inspired really imaginative journalism at home and the use of grotesque headlines, such as CHITTAGONG'S DAYS AND NIGHTS OF TERROR, dismayed him. One doesn't realize, he said to himself, that everything out of the ordinary in this distressful town is at once seized upon as heaven-sent by every journalist living west of the Suez. With the result the events which are given, and rightly, only moderate headlines in the Statesman are given absurd publicity in the papers at home. These stupid journalists out for headlines and copy and scoops forget that amongst their readers there may be one or two who know Chittagong and may even have relatives living there and that their misleading and exaggerated headlines, while pandering to the daily appetite for sensation of the callous multitude, at the same time brings entirely unnecessary anxiety to the hearts of a few.

He would have to keep Dorothy in the picture:

Although Chittagong continues to live up to its reputation as a small Stromboli – boiling over every now and then, the trouble that had broken out was quickly quelled and things are beginning to get back to normal – and by normal I mean that Micawberesque situation in which the authorities are constantly waiting for something to turn up. Since the so-called week of terror, there has been an enquiry by a Congress Committee headed by J.M. Sengupta,² who, as was expected, found after examining a number of one-sided witnesses that the executive authorities, Kemm and Johnson, stood by amusedly apathetic while the M's hammered and looted the H's. The real truth being – as every H here knows in his heart of hearts – that if the patrol of Gurkhas and the police had not been sent at once and had they not repelled the hordes of M's advancing from the villages onto the town we should have had a second Cawnpore here – with this difference that the H's would have got it in the neck.

The shouting had been so loud, however, in the vernacular and the Congress press that the government has ordered that an official enquiry be made by Nelson. So all week he has been on the job, assisted by Craig, who has been sent down to look into the alleged excesses by the police who, after the foul murder of one of their most valuable and popular officers, are being accused of having gone in for fairly extensive reprisals on their own. The result of neither enquiry has been published yet. It seems obvious that the Congress, having a poor case, are waiting for the results of the official enquiry in order that they may have the last word and indulge as usual in a final barrage of hate and lies. What an atmosphere, so sweet in faith, what a country and what a people.

The stromboli that had Chittagong in its grip appeared to be engulfing other districts as well. On 16 September, Midnapore district seized the headlines: 200 state prisoners, being held without trial at the Hijli detention camp, had been indiscriminately fired upon at 8.30 p.m., killing two, one of whom was Mr Subhas Chandra Bose's classmate, and injuring over a hundred. Mr Bose resigned from the BPCC, sunk his differences with Jatindra Mohan Sengupta and appeared together at the Ochterlony monument on 19 September. The ailing Tagore also addressed the crowd and Mr Sasmal, styled as the pride of

Midnapore, harangued the listeners: What would have happened to His Excellency Sir Stanley Jackson if he was the premier of England and such an occurrence had taken place in a British jail and he was coolly moving about Downing Street and Westminster? The vernacular rags made no mention of the attempt to start a riot in the detention centre or the grabbing of the rifles from the hands of the guards.³

ANANTA LAL SINGH

‘If there was a way to negotiate a solution where there would be no hanging, should we not try for it?’ Deputy superintendent of police, Rai Bahadur Manmatha Sen, searched each face intensely. Ananta, Ganesh and Lokenath were seated before him in the jail office.

Ever since the Puja holidays feelers had begun coming their way ... why the inordinate delays, the endless arguments? Why one conspiracy after another? Do you never want peace? But this was the first time that it had been put across so bluntly.

‘Moshai,’ Lokenath drawled laconically. ‘Die we will. But the earth must quake before we expel our last breath.’

‘But what if the government promises not to hang any of you? Will you take the responsibility of putting an end to the terrorist activities in Bengal?’

‘No! We promise no such thing!’ Lokenath sniggered.

‘But,’ said Ananta cautiously, ‘we may consider it if we have proof of the government’s goodwill.’ Something told him that the Rai Bahadur had been invested with authority. This was not a usual police game. He had been sent. Sent by Mr Farmer – the DIG, the district magistrate? Or was Stanley Jackson, the laat bahadur, himself behind this?

‘Proof?’

‘As an immediate gesture not one boy implicated in the Dynamite Conspiracy

Case will be hanged ... in fact not even punished.'

The Rai Bahadur stood gazing impassively.

'We could then consider our giving up revolutionary activities.'

Ganesh and Lokenath looked stunned at this new development. But there was something in it. The idea would have to be thrashed out amongst themselves but Manmatha Babu appeared not to be taken aback.

'We would be agreeable to having you present at the talks, Ananta. And Surjya Sen ... it is up to him ... will be offered safe conduct if he agrees to attend.' Rai Bahadur Manmatha Sen rose to leave the jail office. 'The jailor will remain outside. You may discuss amongst yourselves.'

The silence in the room crashed deafeningly. At last Ganesh spoke. 'We must send word.'

Master-da's consent had come. But he was sceptical: Can the British be trusted? It was a tremendous gamble.

Rai Bahadur Manmatha Sen sat with Ananta, Ganesh and Lokenath in the jail office. 'You realize a minimum punishment will have to be awarded,' he said.

It was true. The facade would have to be maintained. It wasn't possible to allow the boys in the Dynamite Conspiracy to go scot-free.

'This is what the government has to offer. The boys accused in the Dynamite Conspiracy Case will plead guilty. They will be awarded the minimum possible punishment. Every individual punishment will be discussed with you beforehand. You will instruct them accordingly. The day the verdict is read out, and if it reads in the exact manner as discussed, the three of you will give up defending yourselves. And in return for not being hanged you will stop indulging in revolutionary activities.'

Ananta nodded on behalf of the three of them.

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The Congress Committee Report prepared by J.M. Sengupta was read out by Sarat Chandra Bose at the Calcutta Corporation Sabha:

‘I have personally inspected the places where these occurred. I have visited the homes which have been destroyed. I have visited a printing press which has been broken to pieces, I am sorry to say, by some non-official Europeans. This press belonged to the Chittagong Printing and Publishing House Limited from which the daily Panchojanya is published. I have visited the villages where poor women’s houses have been destroyed and burnt in the middle of the day not by Mohammedans, not by hooligans, but by the so-called protectors of the peace, the police – the British officers and the Gurkhas. Therefore, it does not, to my mind, require any investigation. One has to merely go and witness the havoc, the destruction of houses in the town and in the villages. One need not do anything but merely look at the severe injuries which still remain on the bodies of the persons on whom they were inflicted. I have examined many witnesses amongst whom were: Hrid Karan Kanailal – when his shop was being burnt he ran out with his rifle but the sergeants snatched it away. Both ASP Shooter and Mr Kemm watched as bystanders. Jag Bandhu Poddar – he pleaded for help but Mr Kemm shot him an angry look. Deben Choudhury – he asked ASP Shooter for help and heard him say, “This is only the beginning.” Nur Ahmad,⁴ a respected Muslim citizen and chairman of the local municipality, saw shops being set ablaze and ran to Mr Kemm. No notice was taken and later he told us that he saw all the European sergeants smiling and very happy. Other prominent citizens including Maulvi Amir Khan told us how the police did not hinder the looting but assisted the looters to carry off their loot through the public thoroughfares of Chittagong. The police inspector’s instructions could be heard loud and clear: “Two hours left ...” Then again: “One hour to go ...” Only later did it make sense to the people. Commissioner Nelson was at Rangamati and would be back in Chittagong within two hours. An onlooker had managed to take some graphic pictures incriminating the police as the homes were set on fire but the camera had been confiscated.’⁵

The disturbances lasted till 3 September. A peace committee with leading

members of both communities was formed but the situation could not be brought under control because there was no communal friction to begin with. All efforts at recovering the stolen goods were frustrated by the policemen on duty.⁶

The Bengal government was keen on banning the publication of this report but the Government of India overruled it with Home Secretary H.W. Emerson noting that the best answer will be the commissioner's report.

JOHN YOUNIE

'These pestilential September days! The atmosphere so hot, so heavy and supersaturated that you can almost cut it with a knife,' grumbled John.

It had been so abominably oppressive the previous day that it had warranted an earthquake instead of the thunderstorm that had shaken the house to its foundations in the dead of the night. The blazing sun had then got busy lapping up all the moisture, added to which Ananta Lal Singh developed a throat and temperature rendering the Monday completely useless. With the three days of public holiday the previous week, the trial had not progressed at all. A telegram had arrived on the morning of Wednesday, 23 September, declaring two successive days of public holiday. Then the Statesman arrived announcing that the pound had gone up the spout and the rupee down the drain.⁷

'At this rate we can hardly be expected to finish before January,' he fumed as he settled down at his writing table. New movement orders had been promulgated: Johnson was to go to the River Police in the beginning of November and Shooter was due for home leave, provided he was not put on the spot before that. The information was that he was the next marked down for bumping off but the dear little friends had a habit of publicly indicating a quarry and then going for somebody else. Bad enough and more, thought John. Chittagong with its woes and rumours and alarms ... Dorothy could well be justified in wondering if he had changed his abode from the East of Suez to Chicago.

It was the economic crisis however that topped his concerns. ... It is the effect of the National Government's decision that England will go off the gold standard.

In brief, it still isn't very clear as to what it all means but apparently the Government of India has decided that the rupee will remain linked to the pound – that is to sterling and not to gold – and that they will not follow the advice of the Bombay millionaire speculators to let the rupee take its course. According to the Statesman, the latter course might result in the rupee following the fate of the German mark and the Russian rouble after the War. One could wake up one fine morning and discover the rupee worth about four or six pence. As it is under the new scheme, it will only be worth 1/6th sterling and not 1/6th gold. And in no time one will be discovering that one and six pence sterling will go only as far as one and three pence went. The first and immediate consequence both at home and here would be a rise in prices all around, despite the reassuring radio talks by Mr Snowden and Co that the rise would hardly be negligible.

The Legislative Assembly is considering the report of the recently appointed retrenchment committee which has been searching for ways to rectify the deficit in the Indian budget. Of course the deficit here is nothing as serious as the home one but rumours have begun to fly: all-round cuts in the pay of the services – one of them that there will be a cut of fifteen per cent on all salaries of Rs 1,500/- a month and over. The income tax has been increased considerably with the result I am paying Rs 50/- more a month on that account. The future cannot exactly be described as alluring.

Your line of action is clear and unmistakable: look around, discover and dig yourself into a nice, lucrative and comfortable consulting billet. After you have done so, the next thing to do in your leisure hours will be to look around for something not too arduous for John – say a nice quiet crossing to sweep; or as a chauffeur to some wealthy old spinster.

Already I am counting days to the 10th of October when we shall close down for a fortnight for the pujas. September appears to be making its customary extra special valedictory effort in the way of humidity, heat and general unpleasantness.

Though Lloyd George referred to the ICS as the 'steel frame that keeps India together', the old prospects and prestige of the service had gone. Mr Montague's reformed constitution brought in wonderful new parliaments and electorates. Indian ministers had controlled half the administration for ten years now and a further instalment of self-government was due. But the Indianization that went with the reforms materially curtailed the prospects of the European ICS. The old

prize posts had been lost and the recruitment of the European was on the decline. It was no longer much of a catch to be district officer or a superintendent of police in a station where all the other officials were Aryan brothers. Nobody can deny the dark truth of this social aspect, said John to himself. It is one thing to have, say as executive member in charge of law and order, a senior civilian and quite another to have in charge an Indian minister who yesterday was babu so-and-so of the bazaar.

29 SEPTEMBER 1931

A three-member special tribunal led by Mr A.N. Sen held court in a small room of the registration office on the tila adjoining the jail.⁸ The little room was filled with relatives, friends and onlookers. Mr Sen read out each charge and each of the seven boys pleaded guilty. It was a case for the books. The public prosecutor did not open the case, not one witness was called to the stand. Examination, cross-examination and the need to fill a judgment sheet with hundreds and hundreds of words were all dispensed with. By the end of the day, in one of the shortest trials ever, the tribunal delivered its verdict.

Judgment dated 29 September 1931: ... seven pleaded guilty and stated that they did not wish to be defended by any pleader, but the learned public prosecutor very fairly placed before us certain arguments and facts whereby he urged that the sentences on these accused should not be severe ... Though there has been no actual loss or damage to property, nevertheless we cannot ignore the seriousness of the conspiracy or shut our eyes to the terrible consequences which would have resulted but for the timely and smart arrest of the accused Nibaran. In our opinion the accused Nibaran Ghose and Rabindra Narayan Sen were deeply involved and Ardhendu Guha was the leader of this conspiracy.

The three key conspirators were awarded three years of rigorous imprisonment; the others between two years to eight months of prison time.

Amarendra Nath Sen⁹ was the man who had taken over from him as judge in Krishnagar when John moved to Barisal in March 1928. He had been one of two judges recruited from amongst the practising barristers the previous year. The

Sens had arrived to see the judge's bungalow and evinced a keen interest in the garden. A good sort, John remembered thinking, glad that they were so very anglicized – people who would not allow the garden or the bungalow to go to seed. The wife had been rather taken with the roses and the shrubs acquired from the botanic gardens and the husband had been pleased to find a tennis court. They had offered to buy up the posts, roller and net as well as John's patent roller made for drawing water out of the well. And he had been extremely grateful that they had kept on Sukhlal, the gardener, though it had been a great blow to the old man's pride to have to move to the employ of a babu judge. But during the puja holidays that year when they had all met up in Darjeeling, he had learnt that Sukhlal had been discharged. Too old now, Mrs Sen had said adding that they had generously kept him on as a punkah puller.

Too old! John had sneered silently. Worth the two louts working for you now I am sure. L.G. Durno, who was then collector at Krishnagar and also holidaying at Darjeeling, had let on that the Sens were left pretty much to their own devices as they had displayed swarajist sympathies and had actually had J.M. Sengupta, the mayor of Calcutta, and his European wife up to stay with them.

THIRTEEN

JOHN YOUNIE, 6 OCTOBER 1931

A certain degree of excitement had been provided by the arrival of two sloops of the Royal Indian Marine – the ‘Clive’ and the ‘Hindustan’ – the former being the flagship with the admiral on board. Dinner that night at the club had found the admiral’s charming wife seated between John and Nelson. She, with one son of about nineteen years and looking herself no more than thirty-eight, had been at great pains to impress upon John that Britain had to control the baby boom and there must be no more, especially, as she put it: now that you have achieved a son and got what you were trying for. Very modern and all that, John had found himself thinking, doesn’t apparently care a damn as to what she says ... with all the disarming air she could well be French. What a hussy, he could hear Dorothy murmur.

Friday night dinner had been at the Nelsons with two officers of the ‘Hindustan’ as guests of honour. John had not got back until midnight. Latching the drawing room door and switching off the lights, he opened the door to the bedroom. It was one that he always took care to keep closed. The purdah had gone ever since Dorothy had left but the curtain rod had remained in position. Stooping slightly from habit to avoid hitting it he noticed something dangle just beyond the corner of his eye. He reached for the light switch and discovered to his horror a snake coiled around the dead centre of the curtain rod. He had passed under it, his head an inch from the tip of the tail. It was followed by the quickest dash he had ever made – out through the other door across the verandah. A sentry came up with his rifle and bayonet in no time. The loathsome intruder was killed and examined. About two feet long, a white underneath and diced all down the back, it appeared to be one of the Russell’s viper varieties. The next day, as if one fright wasn’t enough, Johnny insisted on the three tribunal members sending their cars empty to court with the lorry escort in a dummy procession while they made their way to court in two other cars by a different route. Apparently, he had received wind of a scheme to do something spectacular before the pujas.

Bumping off the tribunal would be quite a spectacular gesture, agreed John. He could get used to dodging his way to court by devious routes but the snake thrill was a trifle unnecessary.

The ceiling fan rattled away noisily high above, barely succeeding in stirring the air. The best way of getting away from this enervating Turkish bath was to reread the home letters about people who had to contend with the other end of the thermometer. It enabled one to develop a small measure of philosophical resignation if not contentment. All the children were being fitted out with warm jerseys and thinking of Aberdeen's possibilities in the way of the snell east winds and the camp sea piners, John reckoned that if he were now at home huddled over a fire, he would be as much a murga¹ as he was here sitting sweating under the fan.

It would be an abuse of language to call it a holiday but John was greatly enjoying his break. The finance minister's drastic proposals for balancing the Indian budget had brought on an air of all-round doom and gloom. In the first place, all the services were to have a ten per cent cut in pay from December next; the income tax was to go up by twelve-and-a-half per cent; a special surcharge of twenty-five per cent was to be applied on all kinds of imports which meant that all kinds of stores including drinks and smokes would again go up in price; petrol had already gone up by two annas a gallon and motor tyres by ten rupees; furthermore, any stores that came in from America – all the canned goods, fruits and the innumerable products of Mr Heinz – would now cost twenty per cent more. The future, from the financial point of view, was anything but rosy.

'Though the siestas are proving bad for the liver, the chief cause of disgruntlement is the unwelcome prospect of an imminent return to work,' laughed John. The Khan Bahadur had dropped in to pay him a visit. The puja break had been extended, for the Rai Bahadur had been unavoidably detained at Calcutta and would not be back until 28 October.

'All were anxious to know when the blankety blank trial was likely to finish and why the blankety blank was it taking so long,' said the Khan Bahadur. He had been to Darjeeling and had had long interviews with Prentice, the chief secretary,² and one with the HE himself.

'They are making a terrible mistake if they think that the end of the trial is going

to end terrorism in the district,’ sniffed John. ‘The other leaders are still at large and it is practically certain that they are being harboured here itself and yet they are just as far from being captured as they ever were.’

‘The riots that followed the Ahsanulla murder have still further embittered the Hindus, and these are now to a man, I should think, thoroughly disloyal,’ agreed the Khan Bahadur. ‘And the Intelligence Branch appears to be helpless. One thing is certain that this district will be a plague spot for many days to come.’

DHAKA, 28 OCTOBER 1931

The afternoon light glared down on the busy main road. The district magistrate Mr L.G. Durno’s car drew up before the wine store as it did every afternoon. A boy sat in the Nobabpur restaurant watching like he did every day.

Mr Durno emerged with two bottles in hand. The sounds of shots rang out. The people on the street rushed to the spot. The magistrate lay deathly still, the side of his face injured beyond recognition.

The boy entered a by-lane and made his way towards the railway station. Saroj Kanti Guha was waiting at the platform. They exchanged nods. Saroj handed Ramen Bhowmik his ticket and the two clambered into different carriages.

JOHN YOUNIE

The two days of 28–29 October brought in news of the dastardly attacks on Durno in Dacca and Villiers in Calcutta.³ The European Association was meeting at Gillander House on Clive Street⁴ when its president was wounded by three revolver shots. Villiers had had a providential escape – ducking just in time so that the bullets meant for his brain only slightly grazed his back. The assassin was overpowered and it turned out to be Bimal Dasgupta, the same swine that

did in poor old Peddie. Durno, poor fellow, was much worse off. The bullet got him in the temple, travelled through the eye and lodged in the jaw. The surgeons were hoping and praying that it would be just the eye that he would lose.

But the coming days saw a change. A day to the king? wondered John. The old trial had suddenly begun to move. Monday evenings that used to be devoted to his lady would now have to be given up to the king. By the end of the week, the last of the prosecution witnesses (no. 315) had been finished with, and by Saturday the preliminary statements of the accused had all been recorded. Court was to be adjourned until the coming Thursday and during the interval, charges were to be framed. He would also write up the orders to discharge the three fathers who had been roped in by the prosecution: one, the father of Ananta Singh, and two others who had each lost a son in the fight across the river. It was not the prosecution's case that they were in the conspiracy but that they were in a position to know that something pretty sinister was in the wind and gave no information to the authorities. The evidence against them was pretty thin and so they could be allowed to go.

'The next step would be to ask the accused once again if they have anything to say.' John had retired to the chamber with the tribunal members and the lawyers. 'If they have nothing to say, well and good, but some of them may wish to make long statements, particularly if they are still going out to delay matters as long as possible. After that they will be asked if they wish to cite defence witnesses.'

'I do not think they will,' Mr Srish Bose opined.

'But if they do, the trial may drag on for months. If they do not, we go straightaway to the arguments. The public prosecutor will then have his say.' And a long one, to be sure, thought John to himself. Aloud, he continued, 'After that, the various defence counsels will have theirs. And then the judgment will require something like three weeks.'

He closed his files as he prepared to wind up for the day. The defence counsel, he knew would take their time. Srish Bose he had christened Verbose ... the man could talk. 'At least the last stages will take place in decent weather – one will have the chance to renew to some extent one's zest and at any rate feel less like a bit of chewed string.'

The day had ended on a pleasant note. John intended on getting a good deal of

the narrative and uncontroversial parts documented well ahead of time. He was the horse that had been ridden to the point of exhaustion and was now being flogged into a Derby gallop over the final mile. He stood before the dressing table mirror, knotting his tie. It would, no doubt, surprise Dorothy that he had decided to attend church on a Sunday evening. Johur hovered around in the background when all at once he lunged, a glittering knife in his hand. John ducked in alarm as Johur triumphantly brandished a neatly severed half-an-inch from a tik-tikki's⁵ tail. He did not have to say it but he knew instantly that it was in the nature of prophylaxis against terrorism.

‘Tonight I get for you the sheyaal’s seengh.’

John stared at him aghast. The tik-tikki had scuttled off in fright not really harmed by the loss of its tail but Johur’s conviction was priceless. One in every 10,000 jackals is born with an embryonic horn and the possessor of this wonderful talisman, or so was the belief in Johur’s community, was immune to bullets, disease and all the bludgeoning of fate. He turned back to the mirror. Why tell this simple man that in the words of the poet: There is no armour against fate?

‘Just some coffee please,’ said John as he dropped into a wicker chair on Nelson’s verandah.⁶

Nelson had filed his report on 3 November. It was plain that it had not turned out the way they had expected. ‘The fact remains that the looters were Mohammedans and the sufferers were Hindus. I have dismissed the evidence of as many as fifty eyewitnesses that police sergeants and sub-inspectors stood around and watched as the looting went on, as deliberate falsehoods. But the looters were Mohammedans of the labouring class from the villages and not from the town.’

John put his cup down. So the local Muslims had not instigated the riots nor participated in them.

‘As for the Panchojanya press ... The actors were about sixteen to eighteen Europeans, all enrolled as special constables and also members of the Auxiliary Force. They appeared in uniform with rifles and a Lewis gun and were led by Major Baker, OC of the local unit of the AFI. Johnson and Kemm both knew of the impending attack. In fact, Johnny has given a statement that he is responsible

for the attack on the press; Kemm, that he knew the raid was likely to be made on the press during the night and did nothing to prevent it. Johnny gave Bobby Shooter orders on 31 August to take a party of the EFR to search for absconders and arms in the houses of absconders and suspects in villages in Potiya and Boalkhali thanas and to convey a severe warning to the suspects and persons believed to have sheltered absconders. The team included ASP Lewis, Captain Yates of Assam Rifles, Mr Nangle of Eastern Frontier Rifles, 100 troops of Eastern Frontier Rifles, some officers of the DIB and the accused Haripada.’ Nelson darted a sidelong glance at John. ‘The boy could not have been taken without Kemm’s knowledge. Craig and I visited all the houses and schools which had been searched by Shooter’s party. There was no justification for the kind of damage that was inflicted, no matter how hurried or violent the search may have been. It had clearly been a punitive expedition.’

‘The strain to which the officers responsible have been subjected and for such a long period and the provocation ...’

‘The visit to Potiya Higher Education School confirmed that two boys who had been chastised had to be treated by the assistant surgeon of the local dispensary. Shooter had personally chastised the boys of the higher classes at the Saroatali School because they had taken part in a demonstration after the execution of Ram Krishna Biswas. If the punishments awarded by Messrs Shooter and Lewis had been inflicted by school authorities it would have been right, but it is no part of the duty of the police to chastise schoolboys. This kind of action will only facilitate recruitment into the revolutionary party instead of having the desired opposite effect. However, I have reiterated,’ said Nelson slowly. ‘There was nothing criminal about their actions. The government should refuse to sanction any prosecutions and deal with the officers departmentally.’

MONDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 1931

‘Fifty people ... practically the whole station.’ John cast an appreciative look around as he stood, champagne glass in hand. It was the farewell dinner for the Johnsons. ‘A pretty good index of how popular Johnny and Mrs J have been. We appreciate the hard work he has had to plough these two years, and I,’ John

turned to the police superintendent, ‘personally am sorry to see you go, for you have been a good friend to me. As regards golf, the Js go out in a blaze of glory. Last month Johnny won the monthly mug and Mrs J the ladies spoon ...’

The club had been done up in fairy lights and the members of the business community had turned out en masse. Leisher, a long-time resident and a popular member of the business community had risen to his feet to add a few felicitous remarks. Jean leaned across, her eyes all misted up. ‘You skipped the Cinderella Ball. Make sure you attend the Armistice Dance day after and be on the dance floor, not glued to the snookers table. I am so very sorry to go ... we have both loved the social side of life here in Chittagong.’

Wright was to take over from Johnson. The month was to see an exodus with the arrival of Reid as the new commissioner and the departure of the Nelsons. Bobby Shooter was to spend some time with the IB at the police headquarters before going on leave. There was to be a complete change in the civil station. Only I will be left of the present crowd of officials, mused John. Chittagong was not exactly a popular posting any more. He stood by the window gazing into the distance. Outside, a cold north wind had begun to blow and a dense fog rolled about on the lawns. The days were still exceptionally pleasant but now would come the rhinorrhoea, wheezing and asthma. Clear nights meant no wheezing at dawn but when the pale-grey miasma could be seen billowing over the golf course, it was ‘as sure as eggs is eggs’ that the master would be found fumbling through the Edgar Wallace for an anodyne not to be found in any medico’s phial.

‘You’ve managed quite a move on with the old tribunal with no defence witnesses cited.’ Johnson had joined him by the window. ‘None of them had very much to say.’

‘Except ALS and GG,’ laughed John. The two had contended themselves with a lot of abuse, calling the trial a mockery and how they had been denied all facilities, how tyrannically they had been treated by the judge and his colleagues. ‘As if we had not been serious rivals to Job himself in the matter of patience.’

‘The motive was clearly propagandist – a direct incitement to their friends outside to have a pot at the tribunal.’ Johnson dropped his voice. ‘It’s completely hush hush ... an entire regiment will be here from Calcutta by the end of the month. A combing operation of the mofussil will begin.’

John stared hard at his friend. ‘A thousand men on the move? It will be all over the bazaar the moment the transport requisition is put up to the railways. And Surjya Sen and company, who are not fools, have an excellent intelligence department of their own. They will not sit tight. I should imagine they have long since booked their accommodation in Calcutta or Chandernagore or elsewhere. And by the time the troops arrive they will probably be damnably annoyed to find they have come to conduct a military operation against nothing but unpleasant mosquito -ridden jungles.’

Johnson laughed softly. ‘The Secretary of State, much maligned as he is for weakness and ineptitude, is now at last corresponding furiously with the government. At last he is fighting for a *carte blanche* to make a determined attempt to stamp out terrorism, root and branch. And naturally, the biggest opening barrage will be staged here in Chittagong. They will at least show the flag and bring home to these Chittagong Hindus that the government when suitably provoked can still play the role of Nemesis.’

There was no court to be held until Saturday, for the public prosecutor had arrived from Alipore and needed the time to prepare. He would take a long time finishing. Considering all the various incidents and the innumerable threads he would have to use in manufacturing his net, it would be more of a surprise were he to get through his job quickly. As for how long the defence would take, there appeared to be no clue. In addition to Ghoshal and Bose, who had been present throughout, another barrister, a leading light in the Congress – one S.K. Basu was to arrive from Calcutta to argue on behalf of four and it was expected that Sasmal would come in later to appear on behalf of the Big Three.

LADY KATHLEEN TEGART, NOVEMBER 1931

Mike had teetered on the brink of death for a couple of days. He had been taken desperately ill four nights ago and rushed to a nursing home. An emergency appendicectomy had been performed but the appendix had perforated by then.

Kathleen sat by his side. During the visiting hours she preferred to take over the duties of the nurses, and attend to him personally. Luckily, the doctors were now

saying that he had turned the corner. It was his constitution that was helping to pull him through.

They had been back home since mid-April, having rushed in response to a telegram which said that Robert, who had been ill, was sinking fast. Bob had clung to life until Mike reached his side and then slipped away on 30 April. The loss of his youngest brother had affected him deeply and he had devoted the next few months settling Bob's affairs and making plans for the widow and the child. When it was finally over, they had spent a short time with her parents and then taken their car over to France. He had been in desperate need of a holiday before the return to India.

While in Cannes, the 'Nahlin' had come into port and they had gone aboard the famous yacht to call on Lady Yule. She had been in Calcutta the previous winter and was now looking forward to a trip to New Zealand for tarpon fishing. To their great delight she offered to take them as far as Bombay. Just the perfect way of returning to India, he had said. It was to put a crown of pleasure on their holiday. Plans and dates had been discussed in detail and then Lady Yule had left for England overland to tend to some affairs before returning to her yacht in November for the long sea voyage. With their departure dates delayed, Mike had decided on a leisurely return to London via Paris and then had begun the collecting, the packing and the farewell visits. And then this unforeseen event had taken place. Lady Yule had generously postponed the sailing date for a few days but the doctors had seen no prospect of his being able to leave the nursing home for at least three weeks.

On 11 November 1931, a day she would never forget, an official letter arrived at the nursing home. He went through it and handed it over to her. It had come from the Secretary of State for India. Emotion moistened her eyes and her skin broke out in goosebumps.

'No policeman has ever been distinguished by such an offer, Mike.' She leant across to kiss his cheek. 'Sir Samuel Hoare⁷ has offered Sir Charles Augustus Tegart a post on the Secretary of State's council.'

It was a singular honour, but Mike gave her a wan smile and closed his eyes. His eyelids trembled as Kathleen caressed his face, unable to understand.

At last he spoke. 'It would mean having to retire from the police service.'

‘Think it over, Mike,’ she comforted. ‘I know it means leaving your way of life, leaving India and your comrades of old.’ Her husband had little of a careerist in him but Kathleen was determined not to give in. She would beg, weep and cajole. She would resort to whatever it took. He was sinking into a depression and she requested permission from the doctor to remain by his side.

On 13 November 1931, Sir Charles accepted the post. ‘It is chiefly for your sake, Kathleen,’ he said as he signed the papers.

JOHN YOUNIE

He sat at the cards table, as he did every evening of the week barring two, slaving away at the stacks of law reports that were thrust under his nose daily. He straightened his aching back and groaned to himself. But the truth was that the more he could finish now, the less there would be to do at the end and the quicker he would be able to catch that fast boat from Bombay. It was no longer easy to conceal his envy when people talked of sailing dates but he could see the competition between the Lloyd Trestino and the P&O becoming more formidable by the day with the former reaching home a day earlier. With the six orators waiting to begin once the public prosecutor finished, it was impossible to make any kind of estimate. It would be infernally annoying to find that all berths had been booked, he grumbled to himself. But surely they would manage to squeeze on an odd male somewhere.

That morning the convoy had stopped at the Kapur’s on the way to court. The old nose that had behaved in the most exemplary fashion for umpteen weeks had let him down very badly. It had been on the tap since the weekend. But the doctor had already left for hospital and John had had to call him up and request a bottle of dope. The public prosecutor had then taken all day getting on with his argument. Now that the cold weather had begun, the dryness had set in. In the courtroom filled with sniffles, endless coughing and spluttering, John had been keenly aware of the creosote, which appeared to be the leading ingredient in Kapur’s mixture, making the tip of his nose glow more fiercely than Elspet’s after hers had been exposed to the cold Aberdeen east wind. At least it cleared the thick-headed feeling. It was no wind responsible for this; it was the infernal

dust on the way to court.

He turned to the unopened home-mail parcel. Now that the trains were being searched, the mail was always late and Dorothy's weekly budget had not made an appearance right until he was stepping into his car to go to court. Leaning back, he stretched his slippered feet out from under the table. The first page, filled with its grousing and general air of mildew, might well have been written in Chittagong instead of God's own country.

For three weeks your letters have been enveloped in unrelieved gloom, she accused.

A trifle mouldy! He grumbled to himself. What does she expect? Am I to stand on my head and write lyrical prose before she will be convinced that I am as happy as a lark and as fit as a flea and now that the north wind blows all day I go about singing all the time. But news of the children soon drove the clouds away: little Peter was so bursting with health and vitamins that he had wrecked Dorothy's set of scales and Elspet was desperate to take on the nurse's place. John grimaced piteously: her second birthday was coming up and Daddy was a mere name to be linked with a somewhat unmeaning picture on the wall. But the time was near when he would once again be able to awaken at will that familiar grin.

A soft cough and the two officers sharing the house with him came in. They were occupying the old bedroom, for the Circuit House was full up. John waved them goodnight and went back to writing his letter. He barely saw the youngsters. For, just as he had stipulated, they left before he was up in the mornings and were back at 10 p.m. when he was busy putting in his last hour or hour and a half's work. Since they ate at the mess, his evening routine of scribbling faced no interruptions.

Mr Gandhi, dressed in his trademark loincloth, had delivered a pretty little speech at the Plenary Session of the Second Round Table Conference in London on 1 December 1931:⁸ I want to turn the truce that was arrived at, at Delhi, into a permanent settlement. But for heaven's sake give me, a frail man, sixty-two years gone, a little bit of a chance. Find a little corner for him and the organization he represents. If you will work with the Congress for all it is worth, then you will say goodbye to terrorism; then you will not need terrorism. Today, you have to fight the school of terrorism which is there with your disciplined and

organized terrorism, because you will be blind to the facts or the writing on the wall. Will you not see that we do not want bread made of wheat, but we want bread made of liberty; and without liberty there are thousands today who are sworn not to give themselves peace or to give the country peace?

It hardly merited a discussion. Ambedkar, representing the Untouchables, Tara Singh the Sikhs, Aga Khan and Jinnah the Muslims, had all more than shouted him down. But Gandhi, ignoring the Congress's summons to return, had stayed on. Unlike the first, this second conference had failed to end on a note of hope. Gandhi marched off threatening to launch the civil disobedience movement again muttering ominously: And then there will be hell.

Dorothy would have read it as well in the papers. The day before the conference adjourned, Sir Stanley Jackson had promulgated an ordinance bill in anticipation – one that the Indians had promptly nicknamed the Bloody Ordinance. Sir Stanley was due to leave for England in the earlier part of 1932 and his successor Sir John Anderson would have something in his hands to work with. The new governor had effectively dealt with the Irish revolutionaries when working as a supervisor for the Black-and-Tans.⁹ Already Mr Sailendra Nath Ghose, the president of the Indian National Congress of America had begun the demand to start the civil disobedience movement and threatened to have Gandhi removed if he dared back down. But what about Chittagong ... that is what Dorothy would say.

A battalion of the 5th Mahratta Light Infantry arrived from Calcutta in the first week of December plus two companies of Gurkhas from Shillong plus a special force of armed police, and they have all disappeared into the blue. The military will not take over charge but will act in aid of the civil power. But at the same time a special new ordinance has been promulgated giving the authorities special powers which ensure the effectiveness of the round-up. One of the sections of the new ordinance empowers the district magistrate to impose a collective fine on the inhabitants of an area in which absconders are known to have been harboured – effective weapon in inducing harbourers to cease from harbouring.

The colonel of the Mahrattas who was directing the operation, had occupied the Circuit House with his staff. A small party, about forty signallers (British Tommies) equipped with wireless had accompanied the troops into the blue so that communication of orders and information remained both easy and secret and

independent of the post and telegraph department with its endless possibilities of leakage. The only snag was that the grandiose scheme had come too late and the birds had flown.

If I were in Surjya Sen's place I should have taken a fast train to Chandernagore or a fast boat to Rangoon, he added as he signed off. She would not be pleased with his efforts but there was little else to offer.

14 DECEMBER 1931

He lay back on the easy chair, his eyes shut, fingers tapping to a silent melody. John was back in number 17, Barrackpore. He had come across from Serampore, where he was SDO, to dine with the SDO of Barrackpore. The year was 1918. Fragrant curls of smoke wisped out of his nostrils and mouth. Nimble fingers romped up and down ivory keys and a rich baritone sang: 'And if thou wilt, remember, and if thou wilt forget'.

Christina Rossetti's exquisite song soothed the souls of all that heard.

Ten years later it had been mad Stevens – old C.B.J. Stevens – again who had dragged him out of the US Club for a walk down Chowringhee. It's this girl, he had said. ... in the last week of my leave ... the only girl in the world. But he had stepped aboard the P&O without a word. The old married man's advice was being solicited. They had ended up walking all the way to Bhawanipur. Stevens had gone home the following August and married the lady.

John shivered despite the log fire Johur had started to add a bit of cheer to the room. 'Memsahib asked if you found the hot water bottle.'

'Kahan milega? ... Where will I find one?' said the old man in respectful reproach as he tamped the charred fire-laced logs into embers. 'Memsahib to sab le gaya ... Memsahib has taken them all away.'

Through his closed eyes, John was aware of the glow in the room; the figure that hovered by his side; the soft folds of a pashmina as it was arranged about his shoulders. He dug his fingers into the warmth of the fabric. Despite the fire, he

was chilled to the bone. Without a word he responded to the touch at his elbow and rose to go to bed.

The public prosecutor's address which had begun in the middle of November had brought them this far. The fluent and lucid Santosh Kumar Basu, the deputy mayor of Calcutta, had taken over as defence number one since Wednesday, 9 December. He was a quick speaker and would not take more than ten days. But Monday, 14 December, had dawned a cruel one. They had been listening to Mr Basu for about an hour when a chit was brought in from Reid¹⁰ to say that he was closing office because C.B.J Stevens the district magistrate and collector at Comilla had been shot dead by a pair of schoolgirls. Stevens! The man who championed India's cause for self-government and was thought to be unduly optimistic by most.

He had never met the wife. They had had a baby only last year. She would have been in the bungalow; possibly even witnessed the tragedy. This outrage by women was an entirely unforeseen and sinister development of the terrorist movement ... if it spread, it would be terribly difficult to deal with.

What one wants, he clenched his jaw, the artery throbbing painfully at the temple, is to get hold of the cowardly swine who gave them the revolvers and sent them forth having worked on the minds of the miserable wretches as to delude them into the belief that they were Bengali Charlotte Cordays.

He would write Mrs Stevens a short note – difficult though to write.

FOURTEEN

ANANTA LAL SINGH

The jail bell announced the arrival of a senior officer. Court had been disbanded early that day. The news had been that two young Chattogram girls, Shanti and Suniti, had asked the district magistrate of Tiperrah, Kumilla, for an interview and instead of a petition had whipped out revolvers. There had been no faint-heartedness, nor false bravado. They had proven themselves better than many of the young men who had come forward. All said and done, a few good white men would also have to be sacrificed for the sake of the greater good.

Special Superintendent Hicks waited at the jail office.

‘What instructions did you give your mother and sister yesterday?’

Ananta started in surprise. The question was an abrupt one. It was true that Didi, who never visited him in jail, had accompanied Ma on Sunday to inform him that she was leaving for Kumilla on a fund-raising drive. She would be staying at Kaka Babu Kamini Dutt’s house. The interview had taken place in the presence of the jail authorities. Didi had mentioned she would be taking the night train and would reach Kumilla by dawn.

‘Within twenty-four hours of that interview the district magistrate was killed. Ms Indumati Singh has been arrested along with Mr Kamini Dutt.’ Hicks lay back in his chair and rested both feet on the edge of the table. ‘She will be hanged with the other two in the public square tomorrow.’ He tapped the top of his boots rhythmically with his baton and pondered for a while. ‘Eventually, each of you will find your place before the firing squad.’

Ananta smirked. Perhaps Hicks was not aware of the Hingbala incident of 1915. It was something he would never forget: a revolutionary had been caught with a slip of paper in his pocket with the name Hingbala written on it. Subsequently, two village girls, with the same name, had been arrested and held without trial. It

had resulted in a hue and cry through the country, for the British government's police always tended to overreact and forget the bounds of decency. He remembered Neta Bepin Chandra Pal's words on that occasion warning the British: Indian history will never forgive you. Today the British were in a quandary. Award Shanti and Suniti an exemplary death penalty or let them be, to avoid further reactionary incidences. But inwardly it was he who was worried. Now that Didi had been arrested, they would not let her out easily and the defence fund had already emptied out.

LADY KATHLEEN TEGART, 15 DECEMBER 1931

Mike had been ordered to rest for a month and accordingly they had left for the country. Together they took little walks and she ensured that he rested as much as possible. He seemed to spend a great deal of time with his diary, though there was little that he wrote. The entry for 15 December 1931 had been a touching one: Signed resignation. A very sad day for me.

To Kathleen, he had smiled and said, 'Congratulations in order!' They had walked down to the village post and telegraph office to send Lionel Colson their congratulations on his appointment to the post of police commissioner of Bengal. Then they walked slowly back. Osteoarthritis, a result of several years of hard riding and injuries sustained during polo, had set in the right hip and knee. The only outward sign of disability had been a slight limp which tended to now become more pronounced on bad days.

'Young Mills,' said Sir Charles, 'has plenty of promise.' They had fallen into a discussion over the colleagues still hard at work in trouble-ridden India. 'He has a sharp mind and a good set of boys with him. In 1925 ... an incident I can never forget ... the special branch was chiefly occupied with tracing the links between the Bengal and the United Provinces branches of the Hindustan Republican Association. We knew that the Bengal branch also had a hand in the Kakori Conspiracy Case¹ and the special branch intercepted and examined many letters mailed to suspected members in Calcutta. Mills had a Muslim sub-inspector who, though considered to be plucky and conscientious, was never thought to have any great detective ability. But this man discovered an important clue. One

of the many letters he was screening appeared on the face of it to be a harmless one. It had come ostensibly from an upcountry relative, discussing arrangements for a family wedding but the sub-inspector observed that a hair fell out of the crease of the letter as he unfolded it. He took the hair to Mills, who sent it to the imperial serologist to find out whether it was a dead or a live hair – that is to say whether it had fallen or had been plucked out of a living body. The report came back to say it was a human hair which had been pulled out during the past forty-eight hours. The letter was then examined more closely and Mills discovered a code embodied within: Wedding was dacoity and guests the code word for the members of the gang. Mills also deduced correctly that the hair had been enclosed by the sender to discover whether correspondence between members was being intercepted. The hair was replaced carefully and the letter sent on but instructions had been given to all those working on the case to examine all letters for similar enclosures. Within the next fortnight,’ smiled Sir Charles, ‘some seven letters were found to have hair enclosed.’

‘I remember,’ said Kathleen, ‘the time that ex-revolutionary-turned-agent had brought in a bomb to show you.’

‘And the chief of explosives had suggested that we render it harmless before returning it to the gang,’ recalled Sir Charles. ‘It would have been quite easy to replace the charge with some innocuous substance resembling ammonium picrate and top it up with enough real ammonium picrate to correct the smell. It was then that Mills had pointed out that the bomb would be put to use sooner or later and most probably to assassinate some high official. It would fail to explode and the police would find it difficult to catch the known members of the gang and put them up for trial. For when in court they revealed the fact that the charge was harmless, and it was something that was bound to be made public, it would be said by the defence that the police had staged the whole thing either to inculcate some innocents against whom they had a personal vendetta or to convince the authorities that a revolutionary movement was still flourishing when actually there was none. He was right! We suggested keeping the bomb in the headquarters itself but that gave rise to another problem. The bomb was in the charge of the agent and how would he explain its disappearance? The agent had to be protected at all costs. There had already been so much of leakage of information that any man behaving suspiciously was being dealt a gruesome death by the members of the gangs. We discussed several schemes only to discard them and in the end decided to arrange a raid on the agent’s quarters. He would be allowed to escape empty-handed. We had planned to carry out the

search before dawn but by nightfall news had been brought in that the agent was already being regarded with suspicion. In the end we arrested him and packed him off to jail where he would be safe.'

'These ought to be written down,' said Kathleen. 'I remember how in the middle of these discussions an English lady had stormed into your office demanding a revolver licence. You asked her what she would do with the revolver and she had answered: I will shoot the judge trying my case and then I will shoot Sir Charles Tegart who arrested my worker in the first place. And you said that you could not possibly grant a licence for a weapon that would be used only twice.'

The spark was back in his eye.

'I have neglected my writing, Mike, for many months now. I should like to begin an account of the thirty long years you have spent in India ... starting at the very beginning from the time you were escorted by Mewa Lal around Patna city.'

His first charge, as an assistant superintendent, had been that of Patna city with its 200,000-strong population. He had been twenty-one years old, recently out of Police College and could speak at least two vernaculars fluently. The bulk of his work had comprised investigation of crime, but there had been more responsibilities. The inspection of the opium factory, for opium was still legal in those days, had been a straightforward job but the vital task had been the scrutinizing of the wretched houses of mud and thatch. These were strung into a maze of narrow streets piled high with refuse that stank of urine and decay, where crushed marigold blossoms lay among the refuse and wandering cows nosed mouthfuls of grain from open shops. Plague outbreaks used to be frequent and severe. The police were charged with the responsibility of prevention, for the municipal authorities were thoroughly incompetent.² In a city swarming with rats, the disease spread rapidly and deaths would often amount to as many as 150 a week. Day after day they would walk in the sweltering heat, through the affected areas.

'The police,' he said, 'had the unpleasant task of immediate removal and burning of the corpses and the sealing of infected houses having first cleared out the inhabitants. Though effective, it was one of the most unpopular measures put into force by the government. The average Indian of the coolie class is fatalistic about visitations and prefers to run the risk of an almost certain and unpleasant death rather than leave his home. Denham and I would stop to question the

inhabitants ... I had learnt by then to deal with their covert methods. “Yes, yes, sahib, come in. There is no plague here. We are all well,” was the usual greeting accompanied by a vigorous salaam. In the dimly lit interiors, I would find groups of men playing cards, there would be an aroma of smoke, spice food and other less pleasant smells. I would look carefully at each one. More than once, I had found one of the card players with his head and shoulders draped in a covering, leaning stiffly against the wall, his eyes fixed on the cards stuck between his fingers. Here, what is your name, I would say, are you ill? His name is Gopal Chand ... or whatever ... one of the players would quickly volunteer and add, he is not ill, he has had some opium. The first time it had happened, I had touched the man’s shoulder and had been horrified to see him roll sideways, stone-dead. He had been dead for the past many hours and quite obviously the family had been waiting to smuggle the body out during the night for a secret cremation.’

Her husband had had a soft spot for Mewa Lal. He had lost his family during the epidemic and with it his mind. Firmly convinced that he was the kotwal of Patna city, he would arrive armed with a staff and would be admitted as soon as possible to the office of the assistant superintendent. He would salaam and lie down on the floor; Mike or G.C. Denham, whoever was there that day, would solemnly go through the ceremony of stamping his shoulders with a rubber date stamp. Mewa Lal, then happily convinced that he had been invested with full government authority, would take up his post outside the building until some officer left the headquarters on his pony. He would then rush forward and insist on preceding him through the streets, waving wildly with his lathi and shouting at the people to clear the way. With the wild look in his eyes and his effective lathi play he used to be fairly successful.

They had reached the house in companionable silence. Sir Charles dropped down on the sofa and adjusted his glasses. ‘Come sit by me,’ he said. Kathleen knew she should be making a dash for her pen and paper but instead she sat down resolving to commit every word to memory.

SIR CHARLES TEGART

‘The birth of the terrorist movement in Bengal,’ said Sir Charles, ‘lay in the

improvement societies that attracted the best type of lads in the province. The leader was usually a hero for boys in their early teens, exceptionally advanced for his age, a clever talker and the secretary for the local samiti or society. Let us call him Naren and the little one Biren. The samiti busied itself in many praiseworthy activities: physical culture classes, flood relief, organizing poor funds, forming parties to carry dead bodies to the burning ghats – a striking innovation, as hitherto only the lowest caste would touch corpses, and so on. They also made arrangements for the Durga Puja and other Hindu festivities. Sometimes, when large crowds gathered, they wore uniform and formed first aid and guide parties. Little Biren's parents cited Naren to him and expected him to pass his matriculation just like Naren. Biren's feelings for Naren resembled that of a British schoolboy for a county cricketer. So it is hardly surprising when Naren came to Biren, and said he had noticed what a keen and honest lad he was and now in consequence had chosen him to take charge of some books, young Biren's heart swelled with pride. He was to show the books to no one. But later on Naren would discuss them with him. In the old days Bankim Chandra's Anandomoth, the lives of Mazzini and Garibaldi, the Nihilist and Bolshevik movements, history of the Russo-Japanese war and tales of great Indian princes like Rana Pratap and Pratapaditya were common. After the Irish rising, books such as The Life of Michael Collins and Dan Breen's My Fight for Irish Freedom were included in the curriculum. Biren's mind became imbued with patriotic fervour and when it was heated to a stage of extreme malleability, Naren began to hammer it into the shape he required: British domination was shameful and unbearable; India once fabulously rich was being drained by the illegal occupants driving her poor into starvation. The alien power was responsible for the introduction of malaria, plague and venereal diseases and that the early British rulers amputated the thumbs of Bengal weavers competing with Manchester. They had destroyed the village social structure, arts and crafts and conversely whatever they brought in the way of railways, telephones, hospitals, universities, research, etc., had all been installed from selfish and exploitative motives. Naren's statements were partly confirmed by the Bengali weekly that Biren now read.

'After his matriculation, once he is in Calcutta University, he will come into contact with a terrorist party centre which will welcome him. He will find himself on familiar ground and become an ardent recruit. So much for Biren's viewpoint and attitude of mind. Some trifle, during his growing years, might have had confirmed him forever in his views. On the whole the British in India have a record of courtesy, but in any community of size there are bound to be

exceptions to the rule. Any hint of rudeness or racial arrogance from an Englishman or woman would have roused the sensitive, highly strung boy. There was also the danger of imaginary slights sometimes due to ignorance of custom and language. For example, an English teacher who had not been long in the country said cheerfully, as he came into the classroom: well, what are you up to, you young monkeys? He was quite unaware that the word monkey may be looked upon as a deliberate insult and the boys on their part failed to realize that in English the term is a common one of affectionate raillery.

‘But the seeds of sedition had been sown on the other side of India as far back as 1897 in the Bombay Presidency. It drew its inspiration from Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a Marathi Brahmin who first inculcated the idea through his paper, Kesari. That year there was a violent outbreak of plague in Poona and the government was compelled to introduce, amongst other measures, compulsory evacuation of the plague-infected houses. Tilak saw in this a splendid opportunity for misrepresenting the actions of the government and inflaming the passions of the ignorant.’

‘And he blamed, not merely the subordinates who actually carried out the task, but the government itself for designedly oppressing the people and Mr Rand, the plague commissioner had been singled out for attack,’ remembered Kathleen.

‘Tilak was sentenced to imprisonment for printing seditious material. The murderer and his accomplices were executed, but Tilak had succeeded in blazing a trail.

‘The scene now changes to London. Following these events and partly on account of them, one Krishnavarma, also a Bombay man, a graduate of Balliol and a barrister, founded, in 1905, the India Home Rule Society. He collected recruits, chief amongst whom was Vinayak Savarkar, a brilliant student of Nasik, Bombay. He started in Highgate a secret society which was known as India House and founded the Indian Sociologist, in the columns of which assassination was openly advocated. At the same time, Vinayak’s brother Ganesh founded a secret society in Nasik. The two groups worked in close liaison and plots rapidly developed resulting in murders. Ganesh was tried for sedition in India and sentenced to transportation for life in June 1909.’

‘And the following month Sir William Curzon Wylie, the political aide-de-camp at the India Office, was murdered in London by a young Punjabi member of the

India House – Madan Lal Dhingra, who was then executed,’ said Kathleen.

‘The assassination had been carried out during a reception at the Imperial Institute and the Parsee doctor who had tried to save him had also been killed. As almost invariably happens in these cases, Dhingra had no personal grievance against Curzon Wylie, who had, in fact, befriended him and his family. Krishnavarma, while maintaining that he had nothing to do with the crime, made a statement to the press saying that he regarded its author as a martyr for Indian independence. In India, Ganesh Savarkar’s appeal had been rejected by the Bombay High Court and within a month Mr Jackson, the district magistrate for Nasik who had committed Ganesh for trial, was shot dead. The assassin who was executed said it had been revenge for the sentence passed on Ganesh Savarkar.

‘Finding it too hot for them in London, the India House conspirators moved to Paris where their paper resumed publication. Two members moved to Pondicherry from where they issued a revolutionary journal and hatched plots. As a result, Mr Ash, district magistrate of Tinnevely, Madras, was murdered. Some of the India House publications made its way to Bengal.

‘But I must not return to the story of Bengal until I have refreshed your memory with regard to Hardayal. This clever young Punjabi, who in 1905 held a state scholarship in Oxford and had later worked with revolutionaries in Paris, went to America. For three years he toured and preached rebellion among the Sikh population in the United States and Canada. He gathered a band of followers and started a newspaper called Ghadr.’

‘Mutiny,’ whispered Kathleen.

‘It circulated with deadly effect among the Sikh immigrants, who were mostly ill-educated peasants and irritated at the time by the Canadian immigration laws. His speeches attracted the attention of the United States and in March 1914, he was arrested with a view to deportation. While on bail, he absconded to Switzerland and joined the band of Indian renegades who worked with the enemy powers during the War. Seeking thus a safe asylum for himself, Hardayal had induced his dupes, maddened by the teachings of the Ghadr, to return to Punjab. In their thousands they returned during 1913 and 1914. They were known as the Ghadr or the Mutiny Party. The history of their campaign, though fierce and brief, would fill a volume. Besides some of the worst dacoities and murders, their primary agenda was the seduction of the troops. Thanks to the

vigilance of the police and the military and the application of the special powers conferred by the Defence of India Act, the situation was brought under control by the end of 1915.

‘In this backdrop consider the case of the brothers Ghose. They were an interesting pair. Barin, that is Barindra, the younger of the two, had been born in England in 1880 when their father, a physician, had arrived to establish a practice. Young Aurobindo was left behind in England to study, while Barin was taken back to India when only a year old. Aurobindo, as a result, was reared and educated entirely in England. He obtained a first class in the Classical Tripos at Cambridge and passed into the Indian Civil Service, but, unhappily, he failed the riding test and returned to India an embittered man to take the post of vice principal in Gaekwad’s College in Baroda, on a small salary. His brother Barin, came to stay with him in 1901 and again in 1903, making between these visits a tour of Bengal, preaching revolution and starting the usual youth clubs. The cold reception accorded to Barin on his first tour is not surprising. The youths to whom he preached belonged to a non-martial race. They had long lived in peace and had no reason to believe that they were under the heel of tyrannical despotism. It was not a suitable atmosphere to preach wholesale murder. Barin waited for an opportunity while Aurobindo, in 1904, published a pamphlet called Bhawani Mandir or the Temple of Bhawani which under the cover of an involved metaphysical and religious dissertation urged Indians to energy and action. One of the paragraphs was headed: It is our choice whether we create a nation or perish. The opportunity Barin sought came to hand by the partition of Bengal in 1905.’

‘But why did it have such repercussions?’ asked Kathleen. ‘After all, the province of Bengal, comprising as it did Bihar and Orissa and burdened with a population of 78,000,000 could not be effectively administered. It made a great deal of sense to divide it into Bengal and Eastern Bengal under separate lieutenant governors.’

‘Now look at it from the Indian point of view. Taking the two provinces together, the Hindus preponderated over the Mohammedans. But when divided, the latter were in majority in Eastern Bengal! Few anticipated the bitterness with which the struggle would be conducted. In the end the province of Bengal was reunited by royal command at the Delhi Durbar in 1911.

‘But, for the moment it suited Barin. He arrived in 1906 to find the province in

the grip of an agitation of unparalleled bitterness. Another factor that went in his favour was the amazement caused by the Japanese victory over Russia. Bengal, the motherland, had been dismembered and the Bengali acceptance of the insult was being contrasted with the brilliant valour shown by Japan against one of the proudest European nations! Barin started the Jugantar or New Era in Calcutta that year and brother Aurobindo arrived almost immediately to take up an appointment as professor of history and political science in the National College in Calcutta. It was a considerable demotion in terms of the post and the salary offered. But he could now be with friends and begin the publication of another seditious paper – Bande Mataram. That was the year I had been appointed acting deputy commissioner of Calcutta.’

‘Wasn’t that the year you were placed as guard escort to Amir Habibullah of Afghanistan? The man who kept you waiting all day and sent for you the moment you took a cigarette break?’

Sir Charles’s face creased into smiles, the light touching his eye. ‘He was a good-natured fellow but not an easy charge. We had to call him Your Majesty and the government had decided on giving him a thirty-one gun salute. He refused to be outwardly impressed by Western manifestations of technical or engineering skill but was overcome by Calcutta’s big shopping stores.’

‘And he thought the salesgirls were on sale and upped the price when you told him they were not,’ laughed Kathleen.

‘Politically, his visit was a great success. With the result he kept postponing his departure keeping me and the military officer on duty with me on tenterhooks. He drove in state with Lord and Lady Minto to the Minto Fancy Féte held in January 1907. Denham and I worked out the parking plan well in time and a good thing too, for the Calcutta Maidan was packed. Never before had Calcutta seen such an overwhelming concourse of traffic. The proceeds were to go to the Calcutta Hospitals and the Minto Nursing Association. Every kind of stall conceivable had been put up: there was entertainment, side shows, ten massed bands! It was a happy atmosphere of goodwill – probably the last of its kind before political trouble began to dominate. The amir left after one final postponement in February, and in April, trouble broke out in Jamalpur and Mymensingh in Eastern Bengal. In May, Bepin Chandra Pal, a wholehearted revolutionary, made a curious speech advocating the celebration of Kali worship in every home and village on every Amavasya – the darkest night of the month.

Accompanied by torches, music and fireworks, 101 white live goats would have to be sacrificed. The speaker who followed him raised the number to a 108 whites!

‘In August 1907, Aurobindo Ghose was arrested for sedition. There were disturbances both inside and outside the courts during the hearings. A student convicted of assaulting the police was sentenced by the chief presidency magistrate, Mr Kingsford, to a whipping of fifteen stripes. The youth was garlanded and feted by his fellow students.

‘Aurobindo was acquitted but cases of stone throwing at the police continued. In December, an attempt was made to wreck the train in which the lieutenant governor of Bengal, Sir Andrew Fraser, was travelling. The year ended with the shooting of Mr B.C. Allen, the district magistrate of Dacca. He was seriously injured.

‘In 1908, the cases increased. A missionary – Reverend J. Higginbotham, who had become unpopular for his attempts at reforming prostitution and trying to organize an industrial exhibition, survived an attack in February. In April, Mr Kingsford, who was then living in Muzzafarpore as district judge was returning on the night of 30 April from the club. It was dark – an Amavasya night. His carriage followed that of Mrs Kennedy and her daughter who had left a few minutes before. As the first carriage reached the gates of the judge’s house, a bomb was thrown at it. Miss Grace Kennedy died almost immediately and Mrs Kennedy two days later.³ The two carriages resembled each other. The tragedy caused a sensation all over India and Khudiram Bose, who actually threw the bomb, was arrested from the railway station at Waini. His accomplice, Dinesh Chandra Ray, alias Prafulla Chandra Chaki, was spotted at Mokameh and chased. He turned his revolver on himself. Khudiram Bose made a full confession before being executed which gave leads to the Ghose brothers’ network. Another strange revelation was that this was the second attempt. While still in Calcutta, the same gang had sent Mr Kingsford a bomb in the form of a book, neatly wrapped in a parcel. As luck would have it, Mr Kingsford, believing it to be one of his own law books being returned by a friend to whom he had lent it, had left it unopened. When he moved to Muzzafarpore, the parcel, still unopened, went along with his luggage. When the police first contacted him, he failed to recollect ever having received such a parcel. On thinking matters over, he recalled it and discovered it in his library. He undid it and slightly raised the cover of the book but thought he detected something inside.

‘The chief inspector of explosives brought it down to Calcutta where he and Denham took it to the garden of the commissioner of police. Denham rigged up an ingenious device for opening it. The book was opened from a distance by a loop of thin string slipped gingerly under the front cover and it disclosed a cocoa-tin bomb which failed to explode. They shot away the detonator and made a closer examination. The only reason for its non-explosion was that, during the months it had lain unopened, the spring had rusted.

‘I carried out many of the actual investigations into what came to be known as the Alipore Conspiracy Case. Denham had the colossal task of collating information, testing statements, checking evidence, following up clues and preparing the case. Some interesting facts were discovered: the Ghose’s pleasant house 32, Muraripukur Road, Garden House at Maniktala was something more than a home. It was a forge – a bomb factory, a training centre for revolutionaries and research institute for the bomb manufacturers of the future. Hem Chandra Das, who had spent so much time in Paris studying the craft under a Russian instructor, was now in charge and his most promising pupil was Ullaskar Dutt. Buried in the soil of the garden were boxes of sporting guns and rifles. A certain amount of seditious literature was also found. The curriculum included besides history, geography, religious training, Indian economics, Sanskrit, Hindi and English, revolutionary histories of other countries. They had seven other centres and these were raided simultaneously on 2 May 1908. Among Aurobindo’s belongings was the ‘sweets’ letter which became the chief piece of evidence for the prosecution against him. It was signed by his brother Barin and said: Now is the time. Please try and make them meet for our conference. We must have sweets all over India, ready for imergencies (sic). I wait for your answer. Sweets was the code word for bombs.

‘During August and September of 1908 thirty-eight men were brought to trial. Barin and Ullaskar were sentenced to death but on appeal their sentences were commuted to transportation for life, a sentence already passed on Hem Chandra. Ten others received various sentences but Aurobindo was acquitted. The judge was unable to decide if the sweets letter was really intended for him. The trial had dragged on for sometime and it wasn’t until May 1909 that the judgment had been given. In the meantime the public prosecutor in charge of the case had been shot dead in February in the compound of Alipore police court; a bomb was delivered along with an anonymous letter to the vice chairman of Hooghly District Board later that month and a second one followed, addressed to him at the Bar Library at Chinsura. In April, a box filled with gunpowder and other

explosives was found in the office of the Englishman. Fortunately, these last three bombs had been discovered before any explosion could take place.'

'And the one who had turned approver was shot in jail! Quite a daring piece of work!' said Kathleen.

'And dramatic. The Alipore Case trial wasn't to begin until 19 October. In June 1908, thirty-one-year-old Narendra Nath Gossain turned approver. Kanailal Dutta, one of the accused, was severely ill with fever in hospital. He had requested to talk to Naren. At 7 a.m. on 1 September, Naren was brought into the jail hospital. He had been seated by the bedside for a few minutes when Kanailal produced a revolver and fired point-blank at him. Satyendra Nath Basu, another accused, who was in a convalescent ward, appeared on the scene with a revolver to help despatch the victim. Apparently after the first shot, a European warder closed with Kanai and received in consequence a bullet in his wrist. Kanai broke away and chased Naren along a passage keeping up a continuous fire. Satyendra was held up by a jailor while another European warder closed with Kanai just close to where Naren had fallen. While struggling on the ground, Kanai managed to get a last shot into Naren's back and then gave up his empty revolver and submitted. An immediate judicial enquiry was held within the jail and the two accused were committed to the sessions. The case was tried on 7 September 1908 before Mr Roe and the jury returned a unanimous verdict of guilty against Kanailal but were in favour of the acquittal of Satyendra. The judge disagreed and referred the case to the High Court which confirmed the sentence against Kanai and awarded death to Satyendra. Kanailal was executed on 10 November and Satyendra on 21 November. A confidential deponent told Denham that Barin and several others of the co-accused had planned the murder; that Aurobindo was in the know and that he had said he had finished with giving advice and also that burra babu, that is senior doctor babu, had a hand in procuring the two revolvers.⁴

'So you see it was Barin Ghose who was the founder of the terrorist movement of Bengal. He called his group Jugantar, the same name he had given his paper. His was a West Bengal group but Eastern Bengal quickly followed suit. Anushilan was founded by Pulin Bihari Das⁵ and the creed spread like wildfire. Anushilan soon had 500 branches in Eastern Bengal.'

JOHN YOUNIE

Another chit had come from Johnny asking him to reconsider his decision and spend Christmas on a duck-shooting cruise with them.

... beneficial for you. Would set you up for the last few hurdles, he had written.

John had not been out of the city in months and the prospect tempted him greatly. The beels were perfect for a spot of duck shooting ... these swamps, nearly four square miles in area, were thick masses of greenery, weeds, reeds and grasses and from a distance looked exactly like solid land. He had been deceived the first time until he had spotted a few small canoes resting lightly on the green surface. Seated in the bows, holding one's gun steady, one was punted about by a couple of sturdy natives until they came upon coveys feeding on the green surface – a novel and most enjoyable experience. However, it was not to be, at least not this time. But I have other fish to fry, he wrote in return.

Reid, the new commissioner, had taken Mrs J's place on the golf course and though he was no Nelson at the game, his language at some of the holes reminded John of Ramsbotham's rich and picturesque vocabulary. He seemed an extraordinarily good fellow and between him and A.S. Hands, the new collector and district magistrate, they were very busy operating the new ordinance in conjunction with the military. So far, the reconnaissance had yielded nothing.

Taitt, whose successor Burke – an Irishman – had already joined station, confided in almost reverent tones that besides rejoicing in a home handicap of four, he was a squash champion, a bit of a boxer and terribly keen on PT – so much so that he had half killed the men already.

'He is apt to forget that the men whom he compels to hop, skip and jump and go through all sorts of physical contortions at 6.30 a.m. are not trained to a hair like himself and have jobs which prevent them from spending the better part of the day, as he can, in physical exercise. Last Wednesday,' Taitt recounted with mock horror, 'we started with PT as usual, then had parade – rifle exercises, marching, etc. After lunch while we retired for a well-earned siesta, he went out to do a few exercises on his own; then at four played four hard sets of tennis with me at the club and then tried to induce me to run back with him to the Pahartali camp.'

John and Reid burst out laughing. 'And it is needless to add that Burke ran back alone.'

'The men have christened him the India rubber man.'

'And he deserves the title. All the same I think you can overdo these things. What would he be? ... 33 or 34?'

'Be sure to be seeing you at the guest night,' called Taitt as he trotted off.

A cheery show with a big crowd was being planned at Camp Pahartali on Saturday, 19 December with an open-air concert in which a number of somewhat dusky members of the AB Railway battalion were to entertain with a series of sentimental songs.

'Bound to be pathetic,' murmured Reid. 'Which will make the comic interludes doubly welcome.'

Sunday forenoon they had all gathered on Bliss's well kept shady lawn to discuss a spot of allsopp. Craig had come in on a flying visit.

'That the Government of Bengal took no action to hold the enquiry promised will, in my opinion, always remain a permanent blot on the administration.' R.L. Bliss, the Assam Bengal Railway agent, never failed to mince his words. 'And the best that Prentice could come up with was: the revolutionaries could not be arrested because the powers of preventive detention had lapsed in March! The truth is, no one had an inkling. Not one word of warning to the commanding officer or the adjutant of the AFI battalion of the AB Railway.'

A.R. Leishman, the president of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce, expressed his gratitude that regular troops were being stationed. He had been pushing the point with the chief secretary ever since the raid. The new DIG, A.G. Gordon, had taken over from Farmer. He had plenty of new ideas. Goldfrap, the colonel commanding the military forces, was a keen sort of chap, convinced that he could flush the jungles and villages clean. He has that yellowish grey look, observed John, drawing from the lessons at Dorothy's knee, the one that betokens serious problems with the kidneys or heart or both.

'... besieged at Kut.' The colonel smiled, adding the glorious bits of his personal history into the introductions. 'Reduced to making soup out of shoe leather and

all that,' he laughed. And naturally enough, thought John, his digestive organs must be pretty dicky since. Hands put in a brief appearance. He now had an additional district magistrate to take over the work of the district, leaving him free to operate the new Chittagong ordinance.

KALI KINKAR DE

Deenbandhu Majumdar, who was Kali Kinkar De's mama, walked along with Tarakeshwar, who had come to Kattali village on the edge of the Bay of Bengal. Deenbandhu, who had taken it upon himself to find safe shelters for revolutionaries on the run, had already established the Mama's shelter and the Narkel Bagaan shelter. Today he was to introduce his friend Jogesh Majumdar who had been responsible for keeping Kali Kinkar safe.

'A better friend you could not find. Why, when the peasantry, the fisherfolk of this village, rose up against Zamindar Pranhari Das Babu, they attacked his home with lathis and stones without a thought for who it was that stood before them! Not even for Suren.' Suren Das was the gentle, well-loved son of Pranhari Babu who had supported Gandhi-ji in his non-violent movement and lived for music alone. 'Where were all the police then or the friends that feasted regularly at their home? It was Jogesh that made his way through the frenzied mob and shielded Suren Babu with his own body! And the house where my nephew has been put up? It belongs to Jogesh's friend who is long dead. Why would a widow take the trouble on her head? It's because of Jogesh, for he is the one who has supported her and her little boy since that terrible day.'

Tarakeshwar had kept in touch with Kali and the reports he had received had convinced him that Jogesh Majumdar was a reliable ally. And that he worked at the AB Railway workshop in Pahartali.

'But like all workers posted to sensitive spots Jogesh Babu must be under surveillance?'

'That he is. But he is extremely careful. Knows the land between Pahartali and Kattali like the back of his hand.'

They had reached the beach. Waiting for them were Jogesh Babu and Kali. The sight of the tall, powerfully built man induced a sense of confidence. Kali and Deenbandhu stepped aside. They saw the two embrace each other after the initial exchange. The meeting went on for more than two hours.

‘His code name shall be Jayadrath. And the widow’s house the Jayadrath Shelter,’ said Tarakeshwar as he walked back with Deenbandhu. Here he could bring Master-da for a meeting and call Nirmal Sen and Payaj Choudhury from the city. It would be safe enough for Kalpana as well ...

FIFTEEN

JOHN YOUNIE

‘Ye budda sab chaprassi se Shaitan.’

John was inclined to agree with Johur as he went through his Monday morning mail. The old chaprassi was Satan incarnate, for he most certainly had missed posting the master’s letter the previous week. He had either been afraid or too lazy to go down to the station and catch the mail train.

Dorothy’s letter had arrived, complaining of mail that had been missed. A box of shortbread accompanied the children’s card and the biscuit box for Johur. The old man beamed with pride and for John it reinforced the gratifying fact that the Christmas break was near. It would be an agreeable respite from the endless monotony of arguments and the endless browsing on the evidence, innumerable law reports and rulings, relevant and irrelevant. It was small wonder that the mental dyspepsia he had begun to suffer from was at times bordering on nausea. Mr Basu, who was appearing for five of the thirty accused, had concluded on 19 December and Ghoshal was to commence his harangue on behalf of five.

A telegram announced that Goldfrap, the colonel commanding the military forces, had been removed to Calcutta the previous night with a carbuncle that had begun to fester. His second in command would now take charge. He must be terribly ticked off, mused John.

Bobby Shooter had written a cheerful Christmas letter and sent a photograph along with it. It had been taken a day after the public prosecutor began his address. He had been so engrossed in taking notes that he had failed to notice Bobby using his camera. John was intrigued by the old dome with its receding hirsute margins. To his right was Khan Bahadur Abdul Haq with the armed sentry behind but Rai Bahadur Narendra Nath Lahiri on his left was just out of the picture. It was wonderful considering the dim light, but of course it left out

the rows of pleaders behind the front row and the cage with the accused inside.

Celebrations began with a Christmas Eve dinner at the Ricardos and the formal toast was raised to the absent dear ones. The resourceful Mrs R surprised John with an extraordinarily good photograph of the three lasses. It made him a trifle curious at not being the first in the station to see it and dreadful things were muttered about the customs department under his breath.

The Sunday papers brought news of the absconders. While scores of men and women were being arrested here in Chittagong, eight that had participated in the raid, had slipped through the army and police net and were reported to be operating from Calcutta. The watch by police and detectives on the European clubs, restaurants, business premises and houses of prominent European residents had been doubled and it was anticipated that the anarchists would make a definite concerted attack on the Europeans before being trapped in the slowly tightening police net. A Loyalist Association of young Europeans had been formed after the recent Anarchist Association. They would attend clubs and restaurants lightly armed with revolvers in the event of a terrorist attack.

The last letter for the year, due on Monday, 28 December, was delayed as the outward P&O arrived a day late for the first time in many months probably because Gandhi was on board. The papers were full of the disturbances in Bombay, which had until now been relatively peaceful. The Congress arranged a reception while the Untouchables waved black flags in his face.

But Xmas week being in full swing, much like the previous year, left John with little time to mope. A cheery pugla gymkhana on the maidan had ended with a treasure hunt by car and the golf gymkhana the following day. The festivities ended on New Year's Day with a mounted gymkhana – the first in Chittagong for something like eighteen years. Seventeen ponies had been mustered and a very good show, which included tent pegging, musical chairs, jumping competitions, was put up by their owners. Mrs Bliss gave away the prizes and John, who along with Burke had emerged as winners of the bridge tournament having ousted the padre and the commissioner, won himself a most useful bridge set.

PREMLATA

Shanti had arrived a week after the raid on their home. He sat resting his back against the wall and sipped the bowl of cold rice gruel she offered and then left without a word. Boys like these were Kali's boys. Today he was hanging around later than usual. When Kali's mother went off to bed, he signalled to her. She did not hesitate and followed him through the tall grasses and the flooded fields into the darkening night. As she had guessed, it was Kali who was waiting for her in a broken down hut. With him was Phutu-da and a tall fair girl, with a city accent that was strange, dressed in a half shirt and a malkocha dhuti.

'Come.' She had drawn Premlata in by the hand. 'I am Rama and this is Kobi.'¹

Kobi, appeared to be a carefree village girl who had long discarded the fetters of inhibitions and appeared at ease with the men around. 'Phutu-da,' she had a plaintive air about her. 'Teach us how to use a revolver.' An arm had slipped around Premlata's waist. 'Then send us on a mission.'

'My sisters, let us sit.' Phutu-da spoke quietly. 'I can see your enthusiasm but the country's work does not simply mean murder.'

Two other women sat in the shadows. They were Nirmala and Rani.

'Murder is the work of goondas. Our work ends in murder but that is not the primary aim. We have to decide what is right and wrong. As C.R. Das said, "If love of one's country is a crime, I am a criminal." But we have to choose our aims carefully.' Phutu-da had recently become the acknowledged third leader of the revolution.

The brief meeting had ended without a word being exchanged with Kali. But Premlata had been more than content.

Shanti had led her out again one day. They had walked for over an hour to get to the deserted house on the far bank of the Kanu Dighi across which lay the village of Kanungo-para. The reservoir was surrounded by little tilas and the pale moonbeams picked out the distant homes where, in one odd window, there glowed a flickering light.

'They say the house is haunted,' Kobi whispered loudly, setting up a nervous tittering amongst the five schoolboys who had joined them.

Rama had been clearly amused but was busy guiding a boy up the branches of the tree to suspend a sheet of newspaper with the help of some rope. Kali and Phutu-da made an appearance. They were accompanied by a short middle-aged man. Balding a little perhaps, but with irresistible eyes. Everyone seemed to know him and ran to surround him. Premlata needed no introduction. This was Master-da of whom Kali had spoken.

‘Kali’s wife? Come child.’ Master-da muttered blessings over her head as she bent low to touch his feet.

Two kinds of revolvers had been brought. The men sat down and the lesson began: the various parts, the loading and the use of the revolvers. The two revolvers were passed from hand to hand and Kali and Phutu-da went around helping fingers curl around the weapons, pressing the correct one down on the trigger. ‘It’s all right. It is very heavy. You can use both hands to hold it ... Phutu-da does too,’ Kali said to her – the only words he had spoken to her in months.

Master-da loaded one and handed it to Kobi. She aimed it at the newspaper and fired. The bullet shot off at a tangent past Phutu-da’s ear. Several heart-stopping moments later, he spoke. ‘You nearly cost me my ear. You cannot be in such a hurry.’

‘Kobi will do well with a little practice.’ Master-da diffused the tension in the air. The girls and boys each took their turns. Rama had fired a revolver twice before but seized the opportunity to practise once again.

‘Master-da!’ Kobi dropped her voice. ‘I have to speak with you.... My wedding has been fixed. Can you not send me on some action before that?’

‘Be patient. This is your real test. Resist ... say you refuse to marry. Scare them. Say you will kill yourself. If it doesn’t work we will spirit you away just before the wedding. When is the wedding?’

‘26 Phalgun.’

‘A day before ... run away with your Mani-da.’

JOHN YOUNIE, MONDAY, 4 JANUARY 1932

About seventy people had gathered for the dance at the club. The commissioner had made a fine speech welcoming the C-in-C and the navy. Vice Admiral Fullerton, a fine figure of a man, about six feet three inches and a live wire, was making his reply inviting everyone present to come and look over his ship.

Ladies, ever elegant in their evening dresses and long white gloves and men trussed up like prize bulls, mused John nodding to his guests. The ship's officers resplendent in their cummerbunds and gleaming medals were a cheery lot, quite a number of them including the captain being Scotsmen. But he could have done without further interruptions to his work. Ghoshal had just about begun on his elaborate and interminable commentary on the seven tomes of evidence the previous Saturday, and the cruiser 'Effingham', the flagship of the East India Squadron, had had to put in its appearance on that first day of the working week. It was the biggest ship to have ever been brought alongside the Chittagong jetties and it was the first time in the history of Chittagong that a naval commander-in-chief was visiting. A howitzer had been landed along with about 250 bluejackets and marines. Accompanied by the Eastern Frontier Rifles and the Assam Rifles, the imposing procession, about 650 strong, was to march through Chittagong in a show of strength on the coming Wednesday, which would, as a result, be rendered a half day for all offices. The evenings, which could have been filled more profitably, would now necessarily see a series of dinners. He had Gandhi to thank for it.²

'... and I am always available,' the admiral was saying with a twinkle in his eye. 'I have made sure of that ever since the day I learnt of the solitary Englishman who came aboard one of His Majesty's ships asking to see the captain. "You can't see the captain, he is busy," the officer on watch replied. "In any case what do you want to see him about?" The visitor came up with an unexpected reply: "You go and tell the captain I want to see him. Tell him the owner has come aboard."' "

John laughed politely and bent to catch Mrs Fullerton's words.

'I hear Mr Gandhi is quite happy to be arrested?' The admiral's wife, the daughter of the famous sea dog Lord Fisher, had arrived, bringing with her their

nineteen-year-old daughter. They were intensely interested in politics, in Chittagong and in his wretched tribunal.

‘Arrested under the “gentleman’s regulation” so there is no stigma attached,’ smiled John. ‘Not only Gandhi, but Vallabhbhai Patel and Subhas Bose ... they have all been juggled today and their successors are likely to be served in the same way.’

‘And Miraben – Madeline, Admiral Slade’s daughter – has had his cooking utensils sent to jail!’ Ms Fullerton’s voice was full of awe and admiration. Then on a more serious note she added, ‘The ordinance issued by the viceroy giving the Bengal government wider powers shows that the government is panicky. This repression is wholly inconsistent with the desire expressed in London: that is, to give India her freedom.’

Ms Fullerton was extremely attractive, one of the young moderns with bobbed hair and quite obviously full of grey matter. There appeared to be no bridge going that day and though John was no longer enamoured of dancing, there was little else to do until dinner. As Reid led Mrs Fullerton to the floor, John offered the young lady his arm. The band struck as couples swirled around between the dim pools of light. The young army lieutenants remained perched on the edges of the deep armchairs. Intimidated, thought John, hoping they would step in soon. Dinner would be yet a while.

The long mahogany table in the dining room would have been polished like a deck of a ship mirroring the candelabras in a dark pool. The name cards would be in place and stewards would wait behind every chair, one steward to every diner. There would be seven courses at least, followed by the bowli-glasses with warm water scented with rose petals to wash one’s fingers, fruit and then nuts and sweets. The decanter would be passed and a toast raised to His Majesty, the king. After that, the health of the admiral would be drunk and so it would go on till the ladies retired. That was when these junior officers would lay on the tumasha where every kind of tomfoolery was permitted.

Hands was to hold an all-male dinner party on Tuesday night which would be followed the next day by a dinner and dance on board the ‘Effingham’. Too many young men in the station, thought John, and not enough ladies. He would confine himself to the billiards table in the wardroom of the ‘Effingham’.

A pigeon sat engrossed in hatching her eggs on the open window pane of the skylight that pivoted on a centred axis. Despite the cold draught it let in, John had ordered that it be left undisturbed until the fledglings took wing. He settled down in one of the white-painted cane armchairs on the verandah. His tea waited on the glass-topped table with Johur by the side ready to pour out a cup. A happy stack of letters waiting to be opened lay beside the plate of that excellent shortbread sent by Auntie Meg. Ever since the Christmas parcel had arrived, he looked forward to teatime and the after-dinner chocolate – the absolutely first-class ones, sent by Dorothy's cousins. Mrs Johnny, the indefatigable scribe, had sent in the second of her long letters and John hoped his deputy would square the account on his behalf. I waft them all my grateful salaams, he said to the absent Dorothy as he settled down with the newspaper. The headlines as usual were hogged by the revolutionaries and their deeds.

GUN RUNNING TERRORIST PLOT IN INDIA

Big Money Supports Traffic

RUSSIAN SOURCES HELP

CALCUTTA, Thursday.

A widespread plot for smuggling firearms for the use of Indian terrorists, was revealed here, where special forces of police are watching riverside dockyards to prevent sailors landing weapons. There are unlimited resources behind the traffic.

The prices paid usually range from £15 to £46. Smugglers have scores of agents and informers, who have no difficulty in selling firearms to the disaffected Indians frequenting the docks and the seamen's boarding houses. A suspicious steamer was recently observed manoeuvring outside the mouth of the Ganges. Challenged by the police patrol, it was stated that its object was fishing, but it was later discovered that the vessel contained a large number of firearms, which it is believed, was intended to land secretly near Calcutta. Funds for the purchase

of arms were accumulated from a raid by local revolutionary gunmen and Bolshevik sources outside India. Wealthy Indians are also believed to be implicated.³

Well, he thought, everybody has his own cross to bear. His own court was a writhing casualty – held hostage by the tirade unleashed by the defence. Ghoshal had wound up eventually on 9 January and had been succeeded by Sasmal, arguing on behalf of the three big noises. Akhil Chandra Dutt from Comilla had finished his harangue in a day on behalf of one. But since Monday, 18 January, the court had been listening patiently to Verbose – Srish Bose – on behalf of the remaining fourteen. It was all terribly boring. From the way he had started, it looked as if he would take at least a month unless a dint of daily prodding by the president kept him on course.

But the chief enemy was the infernal dust. The days that his car led the procession to court were still better. But on the alternate days when he had to sit with the two tribunal members in the car behind, he was forced to fight the great clouds of dust that came at him, with one hand pressing the handkerchief against the nose and the other clutching the old .450. It was the hand that held the hankie that rendered the more useful service. The week had at last come to an end and the Sunday could be devoted to applying a barrage of cinnamon, creosote, quinine, aspirin, nistoline, etc., to the old body.

Johur led the chaprassi in. ‘He says that the newsboy in the bazaar is shouting suicide of Mr Shooter.’

The chaprassi held out the local vernacular rag, the Panchojanya, which had a paragraph. John’s eyes scanned quickly through the curling Bengali script, a sense of disbelief and sadness sinking in. Saturday morning, 23 January, poor old Bobby Shooter had been found dead in his room at the US Club, Calcutta, with a bullet in his brain and an automatic lying by his side. Perhaps it was a macabre joke. He ran to the telephone but Wright had no news either. There was neither a telegram, nor official wire, and in fact two local residents had received characteristically cheery letters from him only a few days before. All Chittagong was aghast.

The news was confirmed on Monday morning.

‘For some weeks he had been very depressed,’⁴ said Wright, ‘only appearing for meals at the club and then nipping back to his room. At the last moment, his leave was stopped after he had actually booked his passage. His nerves must have snapped.’

‘Poor boy,’ sighed John. ‘He was only twenty-four. But he has been out six years and during the last eighteen months has worked like a Trojan.’

‘One of the brightest and the most promising we have had for a long time,’ agreed Wright.⁵

At the request of both prosecution and defence, the tribunal was closed for the day as a mark of respect to his memory.

rs

‘The firm has subjected its employees to a 20 per cent cut in pay.’

The dining table broke out in sympathetic moans. ‘Ten per cent is bad enough but twenty makes a whaleuva hole in the monthly wad.’

‘I need to find someone to chum with.’

Mrs Farrell was in an ‘interesting condition’ and would be going home soon, leaving Farrell a grass-widower. John smirked over the quaint Victorian phrase wondering who it was that first invented it. They were the only other guests at the Friday night potluck at the Ricardo’s. ‘You are sailing on 20 February, a trifle early for me unfortunately,’ he said. It was a quiet cheery evening and he was glad to get away from his nasty old law reports. Night after night in the old lighthouse surrounded by files and legal tomes was calculated to make Jack a very dull sap indeed.

‘And when would it not be early for you?’ laughed Ricardo. John’s never-ending case had become a joke.

‘Well, we have got a move on now. The affair is really a pyramid, the base of

which is formed by the seven tomes of evidence. On top of that is piled the superstructure of chaff and hot air which has been accumulating since the beginning of November. And on top of that, the winnowing fan worked by myself and my two colleagues. The apex is formed by the letter A – the answer.’

‘And on top of all that is John,’ said Mrs Ricardo gaily.

‘Applying his finger to the nose,’ added the men bursting out into bawdy laughter.

‘In the manner of Romans – as in the rule of the thumb.’ John protested sheepishly at the reference to the workings of his nose. ‘I refer to the able speech made by Sir Henry Wheeler at the ICS annual dinner: “The mistake made in India was the introduction of the procedure systems and forms which worked admirably in the atmosphere in which they originated and in accordance with the unwritten rules and traditions which were there observed. But we removed this to an entirely different atmosphere where the same spirit did not prevail and where the traditions were not known and were then surprised at the result. This is not playing the game, we complained, to which the Indian replied, ‘What are you complaining about? We are within the letter of your rules!’”’ John rested his case.

Mrs Ricardo’s table was always beautifully laid: silver candlesticks, crystal glasses and a porcelain dinner service of white, bordered in navy blue with a gold edge.

‘Ricardo and I have just attended a meeting this evening addressed by Villiers. He has flown in from Calcutta ... it had taken him just over two hours. He,’ said Mrs R, her eyes widening with meaning, ‘had been home during the Round Table Conference.’

‘And came into personal contact with the three big noises,’ laughed Ricardo.

‘Ramsay,’ said Mrs R, ‘was apparently too vain for anything, obsessed with the idea that a few words of advice from him were sufficient to solve any problem.’ She loved politics as much as she did scandal and had succeeded in keeping John updated during the weekly golf meeting much in the same way as Mrs J had. ‘Winston appeared to think that India had not moved an inch since he was a subaltern in a cavalry regiment out here some twenty years ago, while Wedgewood Benn was an unspeakable creature. It seems Ramsay’s idea when he

was head of the Labour government was that Willingdon, who is an old man, would only remain out here for a couple of years and would make way for him as viceroy.'

'We are fortunately spared from that prospect now.' Ricardo gave a mock shudder echoing the thoughts of all present.

ANANTA LAL SINGH, 30 JANUARY 1932

It was their last day at court. Mr Srish Bose had concluded his arguments. The tribunal would now sit and consider all the innumerable points raised and once the joint preliminary discussions were over, the president would begin to write the judgment.

The daily routine of going to court and back had come to an end. For Ananta, Ganesh and Lokenath, it meant solitary confinement once again. They would meet the boys again on the day of judgment.

Srish Babu stood before the cage. He was Sarat Babu's contemporary and though he had initially come in as his junior, he had been with them ever since, unwavering in his support despite the lean times when Didi had not been able to organize money. When out of desperation the parents and guardians had appealed to Mr Younie, the government had sanctioned funds to pay the defence. But whether he was receiving his legitimate fees had never been one of Srish Babu's concerns. 'Who knows where each one of us is headed?' He was quite clearly in the grip of emotion. 'Perhaps I will never meet you again ... these memories of having defended you will sustain me.' He pushed a little autograph book through the bars of the cage. 'If you boys can write a few words for me ... I will treasure them.'

Parents and guardians stood by the cage. There would be no more meetings. And who knew what the verdict would be?

Ganesh looked around. 'Didi isn't here.'

She had been in jail since her arrest at Kumilla. Would they see her again?

‘She slaved for us.’ Lokenath said sadly. ‘I learnt recently that she had even landed up at Jawaharlal Nehru’s doorstep in Delhi. And his first reaction had been that her presence would irk the people busy spinning cotton; and then he had said that Bengal would have to provide, but as a second thought had written out a cheque of Rs 500/- from his personal account. When Didi hesitated, he apparently said: “Will you not accept this from your brother?”’

Ananta remained silent. Not one person besides the three of them knew of the compromise. But Master-da’s words rang in his ears: “Can they be trusted?”

“A broken record of unbroken promises,” he sighed, quoting Surendranath Banerjee.⁶

Security was at its height as Mr Lewis and his sergeants led them out. Cameras flashed as photographers got in their last shots. The street was packed. Silent spectators lined the route from the courthouse to the jail. Ananta raised his shackled hands clasped in a namastey. For once it failed to generate the usual cheer.

KALPANA DUTT

Bina-di was in the news. Kalpana read the item aloud, translating into Bengali for the benefit of the little maid.

GOVERNOR OF BENGAL.

ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION

Girl Graduate Fires Shots.

Outrage at University Convocation.

Feb 6.

While he was delivering an address at the convocation of the Calcutta University today, the governor of Bengal (Sir Stanley Jackson) was fired at by a woman graduate of the Diocesan College, named Bina Das.

Without warning, the woman rose from her seat in the women's gallery, walked a few steps forward and fired at Sir Stanley Jackson. Four or five shots were fired, but the governor, with great presence of mind, stepped aside and bent low and the bullets struck the resounding board over his head. Neither he nor Lady Jackson, who was seated beside him, were wounded.

Dr Dinesh Chandra Sengupta, professor of Bengali literature, was slightly wounded in the shoulder when he rushed at the woman and seized her, thereby deflecting the shots intended to assassinate Sir Stanley Jackson. The woman was searched and a packet of prussic acid was found concealed in her clothing, and she and several girls were arrested. Then Sir Stanley Jackson, un-perturbed, continued his address. He was loudly cheered by the students, who crowded the Senate House.

Bina Das is aged about 20 years. She comes from Chittagong, a hotbed of sedition in East Bengal. Her father, Beni Madhab Das, was until his retirement, headmaster of a Government high school at Calcutta. She is a student at the Diocesan College of the Anglican missionary institution, Calcutta, and she was to have received her degree this afternoon.⁷

Kalpana scoured the other pages for more news. Another version of the incident gave the credit of saving the governor to Lieutenant Colonel Hassan Suhrawardy. But the real question was: Where had Bina-di got the revolver?⁸ The local papers had announced the arrest of a number of students including Bina-di's elder sister Kalyani-di, who led the Girl Guides Society, the organization Kalpana had joined during her years at Bethune; and Kamala Dasgupta,⁹ one of Kalyanidi's friends.

'Ishh.' The maid was shaking her head sorrowfully. 'Womenfolk in the hands of the police ... better to die, Didi.'

'What?'

‘Don’t you remember what happened to Nonibala Devi?’ The maid’s eyes gleamed with the excitement of scandal.

The widow Nonibala had been Bengal’s first woman state prisoner. When the revolutionary Ram Chandra Majumdar had been arrested, all of a sudden it had become imperative to find out where he had hidden his revolver. Nonibala, pretending to be his wife, had visited him in prison. The revolver had then been delivered to his comrades.

‘The police,’ hissed the maid, ‘stripped her naked and pushed chillies into her ...’ Kalpana blushed as the maid left the words unsaid. ‘A poor Hindu widow! Dressing in white, not eating fish or meat, not even onion and garlic! Even her family would not take her back. Her father himself took her and left her in the red-light area.’

That had been Tegart’s way of forcing confessions, thought Kalpana grimly. It was good thing he was gone but he had left behind a legacy. Tegart Torture had become nomenclature that referred to the methods used routinely by the police. And Stanley Jackson for all his fair-minded it’s-not-cricket appeal was leaving the country having slapped the terrible ordinance on Bengal. Her ears were still burning. Was she strong enough to follow her heart?

SIXTEEN

JOHN YOUNIE, 8 FEBRUARY 1932

The drawing room had, under the influence of law and disorder, turned unrecognizable. The card table had been dragged from its place and now stood plum in the centre – an island where John spent his days of hard scribbling and even harder thinking. To his left, on a table of their own, reposed the seven tomes along with other sundry piles of kindred stuff. On the right stood two hefty tin boxes, the repositories of umpteen important documents. Beyond the erstwhile card table, like a zareba stood two long tables on which lay, for the sake of easy access, something like forty mouldy volumes of law reports. Mona Lisa hung on her wall gazing wearily down at the collection.

The Id celebration on 9 February would release Johur from his month-long fast and it was on Mona Lisa that he had his immediate designs. He would busy himself pulling the house down about the master's ears. Mona Lisa would be incarcerated in gunny. John would have to go through that irritating phase when whatever one reached out for had already been boxed.

Since 1 February, he had stopped going to court, for interruptions slowed the chain of thought. Of late, his popularity with the local murder club had gone up by leaps and bounds and to the nightly feature of the Gurkha-strewn verandah had been added stalwart policemen with muskets and brawny sub-inspectors with revolvers who whiled away the slowly moving daylight hours dozing on the front and back verandahs. Gigantic spools of barbed wire had been unwound against the perimeter fence, converting the bungalow into a fortress and guards manned the gates night and day. Not that I have ever been exactly unpopular, mused John but rumour had it that 'they' had been thinking it would be a nice kindly gesture to send a deputation to wait on him. Rumour also had it that two 'wild ferocious boys', a species of the *Infans ferox Chittagonensis*, were very anxious to be members of this deputation. But I am quite certain, he reassured himself, that Mr Surjya Sen would never dream of selecting someone so

eminently unsuitable.

The stenographer thumped away at his machine, for the judgment filled hours of work each day keeping the man at it from 8.30 a.m. to 9 p.m. with intervals for meals. John permitted himself little golfing breaks and an occasional set of tennis. Then the scribbling would pick up again until 11.30 p.m. Dorothy's letters of late had been brief, for Helen and Mary had taken ill with measles. At least, as Mrs Ricardo had pointed out, they would have all got over it by the time he reached home. His own efforts in that direction could not be described as anything more than measly, for nothing but judgment and more judgment filled up the hours of each and every day. Four hundred thirty-four typewritten pages had been readied already. A makeshift printing press, set up within the grounds of the house, was waiting to churn out the copies.

The Chittagong heroine who had taken a potshot at the governor was in the news:

SIR STANLEY JACKSON.

ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION

Bengali Woman Imprisoned.

Police Fire on Rebel Peasants.

CALCUTTA, Feb. 15.

Bina Das, a Bengali woman, aged 20 years, who tried to assassinate His Excellency the governor of Bengal (Sir Stanley Jackson) when he was delivering an address at the convocation of the Calcutta University on February 6 has been sentenced to imprisonment for nine years, with hard labour, by a special tribunal composed of three Indian judges of the High Court.

In pleading guilty, the woman declared that she fired at Sir Stanley Jackson for

love of her country, which was being repressed. She admitted that she was glad that his life had been saved by Providence, and that she had been able to attain her end without loss of blood. She added that she had no personal feeling against Sir Stanley Jackson, but he represented a system which kept enslaved 300,000,000 of her countrymen.

Three persons were killed and 32 were wounded when the police fired on a crowd of 3,000 peasants at Hashnabad, a village near Comilla, in West Bengal, when they persisted in continuing a meeting which had been prohibited. Five constables were seriously injured. The meeting was arranged to support the 'no rent' campaign. When the police ordered the peasants to disperse they refused and attacked them. The police then charged the peasants. When they became more violent, the superintendent of police ordered his men to fire.¹

There is only one good common-sense attitude to life anywhere in India, he said to himself as he tossed the newspaper away wearily; it is a poor imitation of that happier life which can be only lived in the West. India in one main sense of the term at least could never be a land of regrets ... In many other senses it would always be, unfortunately. Whenever the old grey matter began to kick, a glance at the P&O sailing list was sufficient to quell any attempt at mutiny. Home. Going back home ... despite the issues it posed, it was the happier place to be in.

Dorothy had referred to a note sent to her by Mrs Eggerton. Poor old Eggie, post retirement, was having to listen to many grouses and many comparisons of life in the West and the East. But that was the way Mrs E was made. Not so much of a question of *O che recorderi del tempo felice* – sorrows, crown of sorrows is remembering happier things and all that. Fortunately, Dorothy was not the kind to hark back in tones of longing and regret. Once settled in a little cottage in Scotland, John could not see her moaning about the many-roomed mansions they had left behind. An article had appeared in the Statesman the other day, written by a retired civilian who advised that as soon as one said goodbye to India for good, one had to cut it out completely and forget entirely the old days in Bumblepore and Scandalabad. He couldn't agree with the old Johnny more. He had been right in his statement that wild horses would not drag him into retirement in one or the other haunts of retired Anglo-Indians – Cheltenham for one – where one did nothing but play bridge and swap yarns of the good old days in Dustynagar and Gossipabad.

There was to be a dinner party at the Bliss's, for another brass hat had blown in from Simla in the shape of Macmullen, the Adjutant General, who was to succeed Shea as GOC of the Eastern Command. He was to take a look at the Chit Force, as the military in Chittagong was termed, and incidentally to see the conditions under which the people in Chittagong – the Europeans – lived. Four hours down the drain, moaned John. Four whole hours that could have been dedicated to the Magnum Opus.

ANANTA LAL SINGH

Ma was on her toes. The top of her head draped in the ghomta appeared above the window sill, the eyes wide and staring. Ananta's heart caught.

‘They wrote to us ... granting a five-minute interview? Why, baba?’

This sudden generosity on the part of District Magistrate Hands and DIG Gordon had come as a surprise to him as well: an unsolicited interview after a month of isolation. And it had excited Ma's suspicions.

‘Ki hoyechhey, baba? Have you not heard anything? When will they give the verdict?’

It was a question that haunted all Chattogram.

‘Ma, What is this? You were so brave when I bade you farewell on 18 April. Do you not remember that I wear your blessings as a raksha-kabaj ... like a shield? What can harm me now?’ How else could he reassure her? What if they did not honour their promise? ‘Bless me again, Ma.’

She blinked back her tears but the eyes remained frantic. Her lips, hidden by the window sill, would be moving, entreating her pantheon of gods, entreating her Hanuman-ji² to save her boy.

The five minutes were up. Jailor babu came to stand beside Ananta. He would have surely granted a couple of minutes more but what more did Ananta have to say to her? As soon as the verdict was out they would be transferred to another

jail where they would wait in the condemned cells for the final day. This was the last time he was seeing Ma.

‘Jailor babu,’ Ananta struggled to keep his voice steady. ‘If you would bring her to the jail gate I could touch her feet.’

Jailor babu nodded. Ananta was led to the jail gate. Ma had been brought around. She peered through the bars.

Why am I weakening now? Ananta asked himself repeatedly. I have taken my decision. What have I to worry about? Ma’s presence always toyed with his resolve. He reached through the bars. His hands found her feet and those anklets that encircled them for as long as he could remember. But what was this? His mere touch triggered a howl of dismay. She sat down heavily in the dust, shrieking at the top of her voice.

‘No, no I don’t believe it. My son will not die. You will not die. You will live long ...’ She fell on to her side, her head striking the ground, clutching at the dust, weeping hysterically.

Ma, his Ma, had never behaved like this. Everyone was watching.

‘Ma.’ Ananta called out piteously. She was past listening to him. The armed Gurkhas stared frozen in their positions.

‘Ma, you have blessed me. I will be all right. Go home now, Ma. Tumi ebar esho.’

Two soldiers broke out of their trance to help her up. The driver had rushed from the car. She was being helped up; being led towards the car. Her ghomta had fallen off her head and her hair shaken loose. Her head hung backwards as she directed her cries towards the sky. Ananta squirmed in embarrassment. Had he realized that the touching of her feet would have served to confirm her worst fears he would never have done so.

He was led back to his cell. His mother’s outburst would have reached all ears. The convicts hurried past, avoiding his eye. The sipahi shut the door to his cell and then waited hesitantly in the ante-cell, unable to bring himself to speak.

‘We are terribly sorry, babu. We are all feeling very upset.’

‘Upset? Why?’

The man took a moment taking in Ananta’s face, craned his neck and spoke in hushed tones. ‘Word is out. You will all be hanged day after tomorrow.’

He remembered standing very still. The inmates of the jail moved clanging buckets, calling instructions. He remembered, for no reason, the barbed wire and the pit, standing neck-deep in the slush, arms raised above his head keeping the pistol and the revolver clear of the mud, trying not to struggle, for it would only suck him in further. Long bloody scrapes on his legs and the warmth of trickling blood. I’m okay, he had told himself, willing the rushing feeling in his head to die down.

‘The jailor has ordered for the biggest cooking utensils to be brought out of the godown.’

The last meal! The last meal had been ordered.

ANANDA PRASAD GUPTA, TUESDAY, 1 MARCH 1932

The jailor came on his rounds early next morning. ‘Court will assemble in room number four. Be ready.’

A hush fell over the hajat-ghar. The verdict would be read. They were going to read the verdict inside the jail.

Ananda’s heart quickened. Ma had come to see him yesterday. And today, he would get to know his fate. That Ananta-da, Ganesh-da and Lokenath-da would be hanged there was no doubt but what of him, Sahayram, Phoni Nandi and Subodh Choudhury? The likelihood of their escaping the noose was extremely slim. And the others?

The boys filed out, handcuffed in pairs, escorted by the sipahis. There was no seating arrangement and they were asked to line up against the wall. Three chairs had been placed facing them. Lokenath-da was brought in. He smiled broadly at the youngsters, giving them the thumbs up. It lightened the atmosphere though

no one uttered a word. Ananta-da and Ganesh-da came in. They radiated confidence. No matter what the verdict, it had been worth the effort.

The bell had begun ringing. The burra sahibs were coming. The policemen urged them towards the back of the room, creating a space between them and the three waiting chairs. The three tribunal members walked in. None of them sat down. Mr Younie began without preamble.³

‘Judgment of the Special Tribunal in Chittagong Armoury Raid Case No. 1, 1930 – The Emperor vs Subodh Chandra Biswas and Others. Whereas the following have been found guilty by us of offences under sections 120B, 303, 395, 396 and other clauses of being party to a criminal conspiracy which included among its objects the commission for the purpose of terrorism, of murder, dacoity, dacoity with murder, arson, destruction of telegraphic, telephonic and railway communications:⁴

■

Ganesh Chandra Ghose	28 yrs	Life sentence with hard labour	25 years
Ananta Lal Singh	27 yrs	Life sentence with hard labour	25 years
Lokenath Bal	22 yrs	Life sentence with hard labour	25 years
Phonindra Lal Nandi	19 yrs	Life sentence with hard labour	25 years
Subodh Kumar Choudhury	20 yrs	Life sentence with hard labour	25 years
Ranadhir Dasgupta	16 yrs	Life sentence with hard labour	25 years
Subodh Chandra Roy	16 yrs	Life sentence with hard labour	25 years
Sahayram Das	17 yrs	Life sentence with hard labour	25 years
Lal Mohan Sen	19 yrs	Life sentence with hard labour	25 years
Sukhendu Bikash Dastidar	16 yrs	Life sentence with hard labour	25 years
Ananda Prasad Gupta	17 yrs	Life sentence with hard labour	25 years
Fakir Sen	16 yrs	Life sentence with hard labour	25 years

Nand Lal Singh	30	Hard Labour	2 years
Anil Bandhu Das	16	Hard Labour at Borstal Jail	3 years

■

‘On account of their age it is recommended that, Ranadhir Dasgupta, Subodh Chandra Roy, Fakir Sen and Sukhendu Bikash Dastidar be granted clemency after having served five years of their term.

‘For lack of evidence the following are free to go:

Nitaipada Ghose

Shanti Bhushan Nag

Aswini Choudhury

Noni Gopal Deb

Malin Bikash Ghose

Sripati Choudhury

Madhusudan Guha

Subodh Biswas

Subodh Mitra

Shourindra Dutt Choudhury

Sukumar Bhowmik

Subodh Bal

Heramba Bal

Vijay Kumar Sen

Ashutosh Bhattacharya

Dhirendra Lal Dastidar.’

No one was going to hang. Could this be possible? It seemed like a dream. Did I really hear those words? Ananda stood stunned, unable to think, unable to speak. Ganesh-da broke the silence, 'Ananta, we have survived this part of the journey ... Bande Mataram! Inquilab Zindabad!'

'Bande Mataram.' Ananda raised his voice to join the rest in a nervous disbelieving sort of way. The cry grew louder as conviction sank in.

The tribunal members were walking out. It had all gotten over in less than ten minutes. The jailor and the warders rushed in hurrying the boys to get on with it. A quick lunch had been arranged and in the compound waited iron smiths ready to rivet rings around ankles and wrists.

Within two hours the boys had been barred and fettered; driven into a bus escorted by truckloads of armed police following Additional Police Superintendent Mr Hicks' personal car down Paltan Road on a circuitous route through the hills until they reached a small heavily guarded jetty on the banks of the Karnaphuli. District Magistrate Hands and DIG Gordon had made foolproof arrangements. The SS 'Badora' was waiting and before anybody in Chittagong could get wind of so much as a whisper, they were steaming down towards the Bay of Bengal with Hicks in charge.

KALPANA DUTT

Barely four or five students had made it to chemistry class that day. Kalpana sat at her desk wondering if the professor would make it at all. There was nothing significant in the news to account for the armed soldiers posted at every street corner harassing the youth. Chittagong College was close to Kalpana's home. The others, she figured, had simply gone back home and decided it was a day to remain indoors.

An hour went by, chatting quietly amongst themselves when the professor made a dramatic entry. 'Sentence has been awarded,' he made the startling

announcement.

There was no response. Seconds ticked by.

‘No one has been sentenced to death. Not even Ananta Singh.’

No one uttered a sound.

‘They have all been sent out of Chittagong by steamer.’

Cries of joy broke out. It was unbelievable. The students rushed out of the classrooms, cheering and shouting. A young student ran up to hug Kalpana. ‘But they have been sentenced for life,’ she spluttered, tears streaming down her face. ‘Even Ananda Gupta ... he is so handsome.’

Kalpana sheepishly acknowledged the enormity of the tragedy as she made her way out of the college gates.

‘Ananta Singh has not been hanged!’ the words were on every lip. Celebrations had broken out on the streets. College had been disbanded for the day.

As she made her way back home, Master-da’s words came back to her: I had the idea that Ananta’s faith in God accounts for his success. But I find Ganesh has shown the correctness of his beliefs in his own practical success. Ananta’s powerful personality and his capability for hard work catches the eye more than Ganesh’s but of late I have seen them change. They seem to have grown ... almost blending into one, so to speak.

There were smiles on every face as she walked in through the door. Old Thakur-Ma beamed as she clasped her to her chest. ‘I’ve offered Shiva flowers every day. I said to him: Thakur protect Ananta.’

JOHN YOUNIE

Packing, supervizing more packing, moving furniture and saying goodbye to friends – the week had turned into a blur. Saturday had arrived, bringing Trower

in a two-seater puss-moth as promised. John bid Chittagong goodbye without regret.

It was a day perfect for flying. But viewed from 3,000 feet, the endless mud flats and the meandering rivers of Bengal looked even more sanguinary than from an elevation of six feet. The deal struck with the undertrials would never be revealed by the local officers in Chittagong and the three members of the tribunal had been made to bear the brunt of the amazing verdict. Telegrams had begun flying between Calcutta and Simla.⁵ H. Williamson, the director of the Intelligence Bureau, had made a statement saying that the judges had hunted for and had had great difficulty in finding reasons for their deplorable leniency! The word on the street was that in Bengal there was no justice, only a mass of bad law; that the people blamed the government without refusing to recognize the difference between the judiciary and the executive; that the judiciary was responsible for emasculating the executive. It was rumoured that Delhi was prodding the Government of Bengal for an enhancement of the sentence but that the legal experts were against it as the idea itself was legally unsound and would, apart from more delays, set a wrong precedent.

Truth be told, the first warning had been issued by the Intelligence Bureau as early as November 1929. McKinty, the intelligence chief of Bengal police, had made a note warning the provincial governments that a rising similar to the Easter rising of Dublin was to be expected in the Barisal and Chittagong districts. Colson, the Bengal police chief, had forwarded the note to Delhi and one would have imagined that the information would have been communicated to all districts concerned. In response to the query put up by the Government of India immediately after the raid, the Government of Bengal had responded typically by saying they would answer all questions once their officers were free to give evidence. The first in the series of cover-ups had begun. A year later, in June 1931, a second attempt at holding the inquiry had been stalled by Nelson, then commissioner of Chittagong, who felt that the longer the criminal case went on the less were the chances of an inquiry being useful or welcome. And finally, it had been a matter of being simply too late. Just as well for the officials in Calcutta, thought John wryly, for in their hearts they know they are as much to blame as the lowly ones in Chittagong. Chittagong! He would have to consciously push Chittagong out of his mind.

It was 12.40. Trower touched down light as a feather on the Dum Dum aerodrome and taxied slowly to rest inside the hangar. Johnson, the officer

commanding the Gurkha detachment at Dum Dum, was waiting to share a spot of ale with John before motoring him down to Calcutta in time for lunch at the club. There in the United Services Club, Calcutta, he would have to bide time. The 'Naldera' was due to arrive from China on 24 March. He had been extremely lucky to have secured a berth at the last moment.

As the 'Naldera' pulled away, John raised his arm in a final wave. Two grimy dust-covered ruffians broke into smiles and waved their berets. Ram Prasanna and Inderdeo, his two sleuths had followed him to Bombay and after the thirty-six hours of dusty train ride looked no better than a pair of rogues. Lewis was going home by the wonderful new Lloyd Trestino boat 'Victoria'. India would soon be a passing nightmare, one he wouldn't have to face again until six months later. And then hopefully as district and sessions judge of Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling, he would have an easier time.

Though not one of the latest ships, the 'Naldera' was big and roomy with lots of deck space, an absolute necessity since she was packed to capacity. There was an extraordinary mixture of people on board: from Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Borneo and Malay, the majority being rubber planters now without jobs.

His thoughts still kept flitting back to the unhappy Chittagong affair every now and then. Sir William Prentice, now home member of the executive council of the Government of Bengal, had sent a letter thanking him for the successful conclusion to the case and confirming the Darjeeling billet. News had also come regarding the mother of all cover-ups. A clever bit of fiction had been concocted for the House of Commons and delivered by Sir Samuel Hoare three days ago: The police had information of the activities on the part of members of the terrorist gangs which led them to suspect an outrage was being planned. On the strength of this information, a general search warrant was arranged to take place on 20 April, but it was forestalled by the terrorists carrying out the raid on the night of the 18th.

Hoare had ended up describing the raid as the most successful and spectacular outrage committed by terrorists in many years and said the fact was that the accused had obstructed the course of the trial so successfully that it had added to the failure of the court in the end to pass the death sentence even on the leaders of the conspiracy. A signal victory for terrorism over the legal machinery of the Crown, he had said in conclusion, and a convincing proof of their power.

But it was something that old Mr Leonard Birley, ICS, now retired in Bournemouth had written that kept coming back to him: The practice of subsidizing secondary education has created a terribly large class of young men who are ready for this kind of thing largely because there is nothing else for them to do. I suppose they are more numerous and worse off than ever ... The second thing that strikes me is something that we know so well in India that we hardly think of it, but which people like Irwin and Lothian and many others do not appreciate. They attach undue importance to the revolutionary, because they believe that he represents views which are very widely held, and we are constantly being told that the feeling in India is now quite different from what it was three or five years ago, and that it goes much further down. I have not met anyone still in India who thinks that this view is correct. If it was correct, how does it happen that these Chittagong people, after a tolerably successful exploit, are not hailed as national deliverers by anyone, but are most obviously regarded wherever they go in the district as nothing more than dacoits ...?

Mr Birley had been chief secretary to the Government of Bengal from 1922 to 1929 and was referring to the Indian middle class – the creation of Lord Bentinck – one that aided the masters in administering their Indian Empire. The government had as a result been populated by the Bengali babu who like Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, had begun straining at the bit. With all that preliminary watching (even if there was no secret information of the kind which cannot be brought into Court – which there probably was), wrote Mr Birley, there was really material for taking special powers to stop what was inevitably going to happen, and the special powers would probably have been asked for if the attitude of Irwin had not been such as to cause the Bengal Government not to ask for them. I doubt whether these things happen without someone getting a warning which might have been enough ... and the general explanation of the warning being disregarded is that the people who receive it distrust the authority at the top and therefore fail to insist on steps being taken to prevent trouble.

He would have to brief one of the members of the Secretary of State's council as soon as he reached London. Chief Justice Sir John Rankin had given him a letter of introduction, a perfect nuisance that would delay him by a couple of days at a time when he was desperate to be home as soon as possible for the girls were preparing for an extra special party to celebrate daddy's arrival and his birthday. It would have to be an outsize in cakes to accommodate so many candles, he mused, as he caught a reflection of himself in a glass door. Instinctively, he squared his shoulders and pulled his abdominal muscles taut. Thirty-one? The

young Indian army captain at breakfast that morning had hazarded.

ANANDA PRASAD GUPTA

The 'Badora' anchored in the middle of the river for the night. It had taken two days to get to Barisal. Whistling shrilly, the paddle-wheel steamer – the 'Myola' – positioned herself alongside. She was a large vessel, chartered exclusively for them.

Lush vegetation, dense forests flashed by the portholes taking a hold on Ananda's thoughts. For hours he gazed out in rapture. The Sundarbans. His companions took turns to hobble to his side. The water was fast and furious now, slow at other times, sometimes becoming a dark flow of mud which gave way to shallows and sandbars. Muddy shapes lay along the bank and it was only when one moved and slipped into the water that the cry of kumir caused an excited jostling at the porthole.

'Look.' Someone pointed. The sunbeams that managed to penetrate the dark foreboding vegetation picked out the golden body of a deer. Within moments the eye had adjusted. An entire herd was down by the water's edge.

'Where there is deer, a tiger must be close,' Suresh's voice said in his ear. A delicious shudder ran through Ananda's frame. The famous maneaters that knew no fear were worshipped as gods in these parts.

A shot rang out. The deer gazed up in alarm. A second shot and they sprang away. The monkeys set up a chatter in the trees.

'Damn that Hicks,' muttered Loka-da. 'He has to show off his hunting skills.'

'Yeh kaam achchha nahi kiya,' grumbled the Hindustani sipahi on guard at the door as a third shot sent the long-armed followers of Lord Ram scuttling through the branches.

For two days the 'Myola' cruised gently, skirting the Sundarbans and staying as far as possible from the mainland. At last a coastguard launch appeared. It

piloted the 'Myola' into the Hooghly. The boys had been brought up on the deck in advance. They would be disembarking soon.

'Well, Singh,' Hicks sauntered up. 'You are saved. None of you have been condemned to death. Under the circumstances do you think Surjya Sen will now come out of his hole?'

'You are greatly mistaken, Hicks.' Ananta-da smirked. 'Surjya Sen is not in a hole. He is in the hearts of people, in the very centre of the town ... everywhere. He is invincible.'

Hicks wore a bemused smile as the boys trooped down the gangway. Trucks waited with armed escorts. It was time for goodbyes. Those that had been punished were all being sent to Alipore Central Jail, the rest would be detained at the Presidency.

SEVENTEEN

ANGUS KENNEDY

On first appearance Chittagong appeared to be a curious place: big and scattered, not flat like most other stations but a collection of delightful little hills, cooled by sea breezes – one of the most attractive spots in Bengal. The gulmohars – the Bengali krishnachura – were in full bloom and there was scarcely a hill which was not marked by the gorgeous splashes of scarlet and yellow glowing on a background of dark green. Old sand dunes left behind by the receding sea ... wondered Angus Kennedy as he made his way back to the Circuit House. Within days of the sentencing, the second battalion of the 8th Gurkha Regiment had moved into Chittagong to take up from where the Mahrattas had left off. Apart from patrolling the town they were to maintain posts at the Potiya and Gomandi areas in the interior.

‘I should never have listened to Reid,’ he grumbled to Cameron. ‘Should have never have agreed to go unescorted into the bazaar to investigate the noise – a job for a police sergeant and patrol. Would have looked pretty foolish, if we had run into trouble, and got the commissioner shot! I told the police what I thought of them afterwards, and asked them to refrain from doing it again.’

‘Indian police and their methods!’ the boyish-faced army captain laughed as he stood up, pushing back the dark hair from his forehead. ‘Even Superintendent Hicks,¹ has started talking over the phone to me about these things.’

The Sita Kund area was being manned by armed police – a platoon of the Eastern Frontier Rifles. Six new police posts had been set up in the hills and the general population was being enticed by offers that had been upped from Rs 5,000/- to Rs 10,000/- for any news that might lead to the capture of Surjya Sen and Nirmal Sen.

‘A couple of our platoons had been sent, earlier today, to raid some houses about

ten miles from here and as usual, either the information was wrong or they'd got wind of the raid. Anyway, we got nothing. The police are hopeless.' Cameron was easily amused by the absurdities thrown up by life in India. 'Their agents and informers are mostly liars, and the police themselves are incapable of doing anything secretly and most of the operators are in sympathy with the terrorist party. No wonder they never catch anyone!'

Angus returned to his room to dress for dinner. The high ceiling kept the rooms cool, though he could smell the faint damp in the walls. Odd thing, he thought to himself, the compulsion to commit suicide. He settled into his tin tub, studying the pale liquid in his glass. He topped it up with some soda and stared into the bubbles. The faces of the dead were trapped in there: ASP Shooter, Superintendent Wright – dead within a month of each other. The bubbles rose to the surface and popped. Numerous others fought their way to the surface: nameless, faceless – the dead boys of Chittagong. Odd! To be so at the end of tether! Malcolm's friend Harris, the Reuters' agent who did some intelligence work during the War, thought it was the boycotting of the police that had led to the decline in the morale of the Indian police. He had said that it was generally predicted in the high circles in India that the whole force would have to break up within two years at the latest unless something was done to stop the social ostracism – a pretty serious prospect.² As for those faceless Indians, there seemed to be a certain dignity in taking one's life.

Cameron had chosen a chair on the colonnaded verandah close to the balustrade, looking out on to the long sweep of lawn, the flower beds and the shadowy silhouettes of the rows of canna lilies disappearing into the dark. A line of palms in brass pots stood against the wall catching the light that shone from within the dining room. A grizzled old Circuit House bearer carried a tray in and proceeded to pour the drinks.

'I've been reading the Armoury Raid Case judgment,' said Angus as he sat down. 'Two or three things stand out. One, that there was sufficient good evidence to hang all the leaders.' He spoke with conviction. 'The reason none were condemned was that the English judge wanted a unanimous verdict and sentence, and the two Indian judges with him refused to pass the capital sentence, from fear of the consequences. It was all right for an Englishman, who could clear out of the country, but they had to live in it, and daren't pass the capital punishment! Second, the absolute uselessness of the police. Sub-inspectors and constables alike, bolted at the first sign of trouble, every time.

When the raiders raided the police armoury, one sentry of the guard ran four miles, and hid for two days! The commander of the guard ran down to the fields and hid for the rest of the night, though there were seventy constables in the barracks just above him. Evidence doesn't relate what they did! Later on, when six of the raiders were being chased by Mohammedan villagers, two police sub-inspectors who were out trying to catch them too, heard the firing, and promptly hid in a ditch till the next morning!

'The third point is the young age of these wretched terrorists: most of them students, many of them schoolboys no more than sixteen or seventeen. Everyone is so frightened of them. They knew nothing of firearms; looted the armoury and didn't even know how to load the rifles; didn't know the difference between ball and blank cartridges, and fired more of the latter than the former.'

'Poor little devils!' said Cameron. He offered Angus a cigarette and lit one himself. 'And these swine of leaders – schoolmasters, etc. – get off the death penalty, having murdered fifteen people in their raid. It's rotten! They are just schoolboys, after all, which explains their poor skills, their bad habit of missing British targets and more often than not their killing innocent bystanders rather than their intended victims.'

'No man can be a proficient revolver shot unless he has fired at least five hundred rounds and he will not be a fine shot till he has fired something like two thousand.' Angus quoted Williamson, the chief of the Intelligence Bureau. 'It has been a wake-up call. The government has now set up a Central Revolver Training School to train every gunman on security duty.'

The old bearer was back with a plate of fries. Cameron would be moving to the camp in Potiya and this would be their last drink together for some time.

'And what does Reuters have to say?'

Angus smiled. His brother Malcolm had long quit as the Reuter's correspondent in Japan and had moved on to working as a freelance correspondent and writer. But Angus had remained Reuters' unofficial mouthpiece amongst the Gurkhas.

'Rash Bihari Basu, the Indian journalist, has published a book in Japanese: Indo no Kakumei – The Indian Revolution.'

'Basu? Wasn't he was one of the three that threw the bomb at Lord Hardinge?'

Angus nodded. 'According to the book it was apparently Sun Yat-Sen who put him up to seeking Toyama's protection when he fled to Japan in 1915. Of course Malcolm had never ever liked him; thought him a nasty evil-looking creature even before he had figured out that the man had a history behind him. It seems he has been lecturing all over the country since July last, apparently under the wing of the Black Dragon Society.'

'Disgraceful.' Cameron nodded to the bearer. 'I mean the fact that he is allowed to do so.'

'I suppose there is no way to stop it. He is married to a Miss Nakamura, the daughter of a wealthy member of the Black Dragon Society. And the Rengo has been carrying translations of resolutions passed by the student body of Meiji University, strongly condemning British rule in India and sympathizing with the poor, downtrodden Indians. Malcolm says that Basu has been threatening to have Gandhi and Nehru replaced if they showed signs of coming to terms with the Government of India.'

'What a perfect blighter!' Cameron's refill had arrived, the glass frosted up by a generous helping of ice. He was in no hurry to go in for dinner.

Cameron, smiled Angus, could extract the most from out of life's simplest pleasures and life in India suited him eminently. Being an officer of the Gurkhas was all about playing polo and football with the sturdy hill men. Neither England nor an appointment in the Royal forces could ever have given a youngster-without-means a life such as this. 'And Mahendra Pratap is back in Japan! Malcolm had dinner at the Imperial the other day with Colonel and Mrs Kelly who are passing through Japan on their way home and tells me that Pratap is financed from Moscow. Not a communist, but quite prepared to play their game so long as they make it worth his while. And not an altruistic independence worker either, but ready to pose as such in order to satisfy his love of intrigue. Col Kelly's opinion of Gandhi is that he is an out-and-out humbug but a very astute one!'³

ANANTA LAL SINGH

Ranadhir balanced himself effortlessly on the parallel bars. He appeared to be oblivious of Ananta's late entry into the bomb yard. The small enclosure with its high walls had been fitted with equipment to keep the swadeshi babus occupied. The wiry teenager with his mop of dark curls was used to the attention, and the physical prowess of his boys was a source of great pride for Ananta. Their evening exercise sessions generated as much interest in the Alipore Jail authorities and its inmates as it had done at Chittagong Jail. The frequency of the sudden surprise rounds by Mr B.J. Shooter and Mr Lewis during the evenings had partly been generated by the natural sportsmanship that was inherent in the two young policemen who had not hesitated in giving in to little challenges.

He had had a legal interview with Baba earlier in the evening and was anxious to speak with Ranadhir. Baba had brought very disturbing news: Ranadhir's parents were consulting with lawyers hoping to file an appeal in high court. Why? When Ranadhir along with Fakir Sen, Subodh Roy and Sukhendu Bikash Dastidar had been recommended clemency after five years of imprisonment on account of their age? Why ... because Ranadhir's parents felt even five years was too long. It would ruin his education, break down his health ... and who knew if the British government would eventually offer clemency. Baba had rushed to consult Mr B.C. Chatterji and Sarat Babu. They had read the BCLA Act together. It was clear that no right of appeal or application for revision had been given to the government, by any law, in a case of trial under Section 3 of the BCLA supplementary act of 1925. The right of appeal belonged to the convicted person alone. If Ranadhir signed the vakalatnama, the case would be reopened; it could then take another two years and the possibility of the sentences being enhanced was a real fear. But Ranadhir's father had been convinced that the high court could not possibly enhance the sentence given by the tribunal and if anything, could only reduce it. Ranadhir's father is being misled, Baba had warned. And remember, he had added, in the time taken by the high court to wind up the case and for everyone to begin their sentences all over again, your brother could well have finished his two years and the youngsters would have only three more left to go. What Baba did not know was the secret deal that had spared several lives. It would no longer be applicable.

It was now just him, his brother Nand Lal, Subodh Choudhury and Ranadhir at the Alipore Jail. The rest had been transferred out in groups and sent to other jails. What kinds of pressures were being exerted on them, he wondered. Would the youngsters be able to withstand parental demands? And Ranadhir had a legal interview slated for the next day.

The sergeant and the sipahis announced the end of the session. It was time to wash up and return to the cells. Ananta took the opportunity to update Ranadhir.

‘Your father will scold, cajole and try to compel you into signing the vakalatnama. He will force the pen on you and try to guide your hand. Your mother will weep and tear her hair as will your boudi. You will face a great deal of emotional blackmail.’

A mischievous glimmer came into the boy’s eyes. ‘So I will be the one to award the death sentences!’

rs

Ananta sat in his cell reading. Reading! He laughed to himself. For Ananta Lal Singh, being made to read was like being made to swallow several doses of bitter medicine. Still Jyotish-da, Jyotish Bhowmik, had sent a couple of books to help him while away his time. What would he make of classics? And poetry? He who had not a shred of feeling, never experienced a tender emotion? Flipping through the pages of Romain Rolland’s Jean Christophe he read a few lines here and there.

Will you be my friend?

Otto murmured: Yes ...

Ananta yawned as he turned the page. So eleven-year-old Jean Christopher, the musician, has made a new friend! Now little Otto has written him a letter. Ananta was about to skip reading the letter along with Christopher when his eyes locked themselves on to a couple of words: He had no need to ask himself from whence it came. He ran and shut himself up in his room to read it. It was written on pale blue paper in a laboured, long uncertain hand with very correct flourishes ...

Ananta was transported to an age gone by. He was once again a fourteen-year-old who had made a special friend during the pujas, one who had to leave for about a fortnight soon after the holidays. Tears had sprung to his eyes as he

waved goodbye. But the very next day a postcard arrived ... posted from Laksham Junction – the first station with postal facilities. His heart had skipped a beat and he had raced with it to his room bolting the door behind him.

... Your very devoted servant and friend Otto Diener.

P.S. On Sunday please do not call for me at home. It would be better, if you will, for us to meet at the Schloss Garten.

Christopher read the letter with tears in his eyes. He kissed it; he laughed aloud; he jumped about on his bed. Then he ran to the table and took his pen in his hand to reply at once. He could not wait a moment. But he was not used to writing. He could not express what was swelling in his heart; he dug into the paper with his pen and blackened his fingers with ink; he stamped impatiently. At last by dint of putting out his tongue and making five or six drafts, he succeeded in writing in malformed letters, which flew out in all directions and with terrific mistake in spelling:

My soul,

... Yours always

Christopher.

His friend's absence had eaten away at him. And though he was yet to return, Ananta had been unable to keep himself from walking four miles everyday for but a glimpse of his home. Christopher was devoured with impatience for the rest of the week. He would go out of his way and make long turns to pass by Otto's house. Not that he counted on seeing him, but the sight of the house was enough to make him grow pale and red with emotion. On the Thursday he could bear it no longer and sent a second letter even more high-flown than the first. Otto answered it sentimentally. Sunday came at length and Otto was punctually at the meeting place. But Christopher had been there for an hour, waiting impatiently for the walk. He began to imagine dreadfully that Otto would not

come. He trembled lest Otto should be ill, for he did not suppose for a moment that Otto might break his word. He whispered over and over again, 'Dear God, let him come – let him come.'

A sudden awareness: a strange sensation that was both pleasurable and horrifying, like the unexpected brush of a moth's wing against skin. For over a year now he had questioned himself as to why he had surrendered. And he had no real explanation; not for himself nor for those detectives who had been desperate to prise the answer out of him. The question of surrendering for the sole aim of murdering the betrayers and confessors had never occurred to him. They need not have worried so. Then why?

Christopher ran to him with his throat dry and wished him good-day! Otto replied, 'Good-day!' And then found they had nothing more to say to each other, except that the weather was fine, and that it was five or six minutes past ten, or it might be ten past because the castle clock was always slow.

There was a woolly feel to his fingers as if invisible gloves prevented him from really touching the page. Why after those two instances in 1920 and '21, when despite the hurt and the bruised ego, had he not been able to commit suicide? He went suddenly numb with the momentousness of this insight. Death by itself could never have provided the answer he sought. Only in a slow lingering death played out before his eyes would he read either rejection or the dawning of comprehension, the realization of the true depth of his love.

PRITILATA WADDADAR, MONDAY, 13 JUNE 1932

The sound of a .450 Colt going off and the newspaper stretched tight between the branches of a tree fluttered slightly. A neat hole in the dead centre was all that had registered. The markswoman had been on target.

Nirmal-da made no appreciative remarks, nor were congratulations forthcoming. Priti did not need any, for the glow of pleasure that was flooding her being was enough. He had left before she had brought her arm down and had gone up the staircase that ran on the outside of the rear wall of the two-storeyed mud-and-

straw house.

He was happy. She didn't need to be told that. Ever since Ram Krishna had spoken about him, Priti had been consumed with an overwhelming desire to be introduced to him, meet Master-da and begin her life's work. Tarakeshwar – Phutu-da – had been badgered until he had agreed to have a word with Master-da. But there was to be no meeting to be had until the exams were over. Priti had qualified with a distinction from Bethune College and Phutu-da had kept his promise.

'Rani!' She was being called by her code name.⁴ Peering past the leafy branches that kept the top-floor window out of sight, she could see Nirmal-da waving to her. She made her way up. Master-da and Nirmal-da sat cross-legged on a cot. They had something to say.

'Nirmal Babu tells me that I should let the women lead now. But I say Rani has to be sharpened some more.'

'Then it is time for you to look into her training.' Nirmal-da interjected. He had been training her since the first week of May and had not brought her before Master-da until the month had gone by.

Master-da laughed softly. 'Yes. Yes,' he nodded. 'But will she be able to leave home?'

'That is the question, Rani.' Nirmal-da looked directly into her eyes. 'How is it that you make no mention of going home this time? What is it that you have told them?'

'That I am going to Sita Kund for a teerth. That I won't be back before two days.' She looked up hesitantly at the two men and then added in a tone of defiance. 'Are you surprised that I lied? But in my heart this is the holiest of pilgrimages.' She settled herself on the dirt floor.

Nirmal-da reached out to place his hand on her shoulder. 'Does that mean you have to go back today?' he asked tenderly.

'Why, Nirmal-da?' Priti gazed up into his eyes. 'Why not let me stay?'

'Will you lead a lokkhi-chhara life like the rest of us? A life with no goodness,

no godliness? No, the goddess Lokkhi has no time for people like us. But this Master-da must decide.'

Master-da was looking amused. Realizing that he would not commit himself so soon, Nirmal-da continued. 'You know that song – 'Esho sonar boroney rani go' ... Come my queen, come dressed in all your gold finery ... there are three ranis in our group of which you are the eldest.' He made use of the words of the popular song felicitating the motherland.

'And the darkest? I may not be one amongst the golden ones but I intend to be the most loved.'

Master-da burst out laughing. 'And the naughtiest one!' he said.

'Can girls be this mischievous?' Nirmal-da pretended to be scandalized. Then he sighed. 'It is matter of sorrow that I have not been able to see you and Rama⁵ together.'

Priti was puzzled. Why this sadness in his voice, she wondered. 'Why is that, Nirmal-da. All you have to do is order, and we will come together.'

'I will probably not meet Rama again ... tell her not to be angry with me.'
Nirmal-da continued to speak in that strange manner. 'The two of you have each other. You can always talk to each other ... No one can go against destiny ... no matter what we do, we have to succumb to whatever destiny has in store for us.'

Master-da had disappeared into the adjacent room to sit by Bhola's side. Bhola, who had gone home for a day, had returned in the morning burning with fever. 'I've bade them my last farewell,' he had said. 'I made all my seven boudis line up. Fall in, I told them. This is my order.' Bhola had laughed. Savitri Devi had forced him to go upstairs and lie down. Between her and her daughter, Snehalata, they had applied strips of wet cloth to his forehead to bring the fever down. He must be feeling better now, thought Priti to herself for she could hear him humming. Master-da had heard him too.

'You and Master-da must organize a planchette and call him ... not me. Baba! I am too scared ... suppose he scolds me for not doing enough.'

Priti realized Nirmal-da was talking of Ram Krishna. She had lost him there for a few moments. She thought he had dozed off but he talked even though sleep

overcame the senses in the sultry heat of the late afternoon. He kept watch every night and it was important that he rest during the day.

‘... oi Bhola ta is Master-da’s assistant ... his English is good. Master-da makes him write so many things ...’ Nirmal-da’s voice trailed off. ‘I used to be able to meditate hour after hour but now I think there is nothing left in my brain. Sometimes I would just lie and weep ... for three to four days at a time. Everyone at home used to wonder ... what has happened to him? I thought revolutionaries are really sadhus. The poet has written ...probably talking about them:

Kon aalotey praner pradip jaliye tumi dhoraye asho

Sadhak ogo premik ogo paagol ogo tumi dhoraye esho.

What is that light with which you light the lamp of
your soul before coming to this earth

O devotee, o lover, o crazed one come down to this earth

An incredible sadness was beginning to take hold over Priti. Seeing her face crumple Nirmal-da said, ‘You are no longer on this side of the river of life. You have already crossed over.’

Priti shook herself. Her idol, her guide could be slipping into that world of sadness but she would have to get a hold over herself. ‘All that is all right, Nirmal-da, but before you all take your leave put us girls to some good use.’

A smile touched his eyes. ‘Arrey ... I know even after we are gone you will carry on the fight ... but sometimes we are shallow enough to think that without us nothing will be possible. Master-da’s last work is still undone ... and that is female action ... show the world how strong our women are.’

‘I desperately want to give my life, Nirmal-da. Chandannagar’s Suhashini-di has lost a great opportunity. If the police arrive now ... I am not going to leave your side.’

‘Why should you die? My dear little sister, stroke my back; lend me some of your strength.’ He turned his back towards her trying to sleep.

Priti reached out and began to lightly massage the nape of the neck tracing her hand along the curve of the powerfully built shoulders. It made her conscious of a sense of joy, one she was conscious of never having experienced before. ‘But I will not give you my strength ... I am going to draw it from you.’ She whispered.

Nirmal-da pretended to scold. ‘And I will be born in my next life as your sister.’

‘I am no longer going to live as a lokkhi-chhara girl.’ Priti was amazed at the pleasure she was deriving out of the situation. An inner voice told her to grab as much as she could. True happiness can never last long. It was strange but in these last two days she had barely spoken to Master-da. She seemed to be with Nirmal-da all the time ... as if they were trying to finish all the conversations possible in a lifetime.

‘Go now,’ he mumbled sleepily. ‘Feed that Bhola a little something.’

Savitri Devi sat outside her door blowing into the glowing charcoal. The flames leaped up licking the blackened clay pot that was used to boil the rice. The end of her plain, and once white, cotton sari had fallen away from her head and she used it to dab the sweat streaming from her face. Though barely middle-aged, the hard life of a widow struggling to eke out a living and bring up two children had etched itself on to her face. Here, at the edge of the Dhalghat village, she lived keeping her distance from the world at large. But to Master-da she had opened her heart and her home. She sat up nights with a sharp kharga and scolded them to get to bed.

The evening sky had begun to darken and it was reasonably safe to venture outside. Priti tucked the edge of her sari firmly at the waist and sat down on her haunches. The sago had been soaking since morning. Savitri Devi removed her cooking pot and Priti set the bowl on the embers. The sago was soft now. She pushed her bangles further up her arm until they held fast and drained the water. Squeezing a lemon on to the pile of fluffy round little white balls she added a

generous handful of sugar. Bhola would need his strength. The boy was reciting, 'Hriday aamar naachey rey, aajikey mayurer moto naachey rey' ... My spirit dances like the peacock today.

She smiled as he raised his voice forcing the dramatic inflections for all to hear. The sago had cooled and had been mixed to her liking. As she climbed the bamboo ladder used within the house, little Bhola sat up in anticipation.

'Wait. Stay in bed. I will feed you.' Priti sat by his side and fed him by hand.

'Aye, Rani, aye.' Savitri Devi called. She had lit a small oil lamp and was serving the hot rice on the only thala she had. By the time Priti came down, Master-da had seated himself on the straw mat before it. Setting down the bowl with a nervous clatter, she ran back up the ladder. Nirmal-da had said he did not want any dinner today. But yesterday they had shared the thala after Master-da had finished.

'Nirmal-da, you have to come down for bhaat.' She could feel the heat begin to spread over her face ... the embarrassment of having to share the thala with Master-da had prompted the flight. Now the fact she had run away was adding to her discomfiture.

Nirmal-da couldn't stop laughing. 'Kemon jobdo ebar? ... Now I've got you.'

Master-da had shot upstairs right behind her. 'They are here,' he hissed.

rs

Word had come late Sunday night to the camp in the Potiya district: a house on the outskirts of Dhalghat village was being used as a shelter. Cameron had contemplated the news in silence. 'Tomorrow. Too late now,' he had said.

Sub-inspector Monoranjan Bose had accepted the decision quietly for this kind of information was brought in often and raids were carried out unsuccessfully at least three times a week. It would have become light by the time they reached and their cover would have been blown.

But today neither officer had hesitated. Without waiting to round up his entire platoon, Cameron had set off with the detachment under his command: seven Gurkha sipahis and their havaladar. Bose had brought along a junior sub-inspector from the Potiya Thana and two constables. The men were ordered to form a cordon around the house. It was 9 p.m.

Cameron and Bose launched themselves at the tin-and-wood door, left shoulder forward.

PRITILATA WADDADAR

‘I’m not leaving.’ The words had left Priti’s mouth without her permission and she had not missed Master-da’s angry glare. She was being pushed down the ladder into the dark.

‘Go quickly,’ he hissed. ‘Pretend you are one of the family.’

Savitri Devi’s hands were reaching out, dragging her down and across to the corner where her little son and daughter huddled. At a sign from the mother, the children clung to Priti. The door burst open and an Englishman stumbled into the room, revolver in hand. The policeman behind him shone a flashlight over the cowering women and children. The light swung around on to the ladder. The Englishman ran across the room; went up a couple of steps; changed his mind and then rushed outside followed by the policeman. Priti could hear their steps thundering up the mud staircase at the back. Shots rang out and a heavy body thudded to the ground. Intense firing broke out immediately and the walls of the house trembled.

‘Bande Mataram!’ The piercing cry reached her ears. The next thing was Nirmal-da’s voice. The pain in his cry drove her into a mad frenzy. She lunged at the ladder but was dragged back by Savitri Devi and her daughter. ‘Rani! Rani!’ she could hear him call. ‘Please,’ she begged. ‘Let me go. Let me go to him just once.’ She managed to clamber up a few steps but the hands clawed into her flesh, pulled at her sari dragging her away. She could still hear him call. It was threatening to tear her soul out. She lashed out viciously, striking the face closest

to her. Still they held on.

‘He wants to say something,’ she sobbed between gasps. ‘What does he have to say ... Oh God, let me see him just once before ...?’ The thought twisted like a knife in a wound and she collapsed in a heap. ‘What more do you want?’ An inner voice asked her. ‘Your name is on his lips even as he leaves the world.’

Master-da and Bhola were coming down the stairs revolvers held at ready. There was a sense of relief ... at least they were alive. Master-da raised her to her feet and clasped her to his chest murmuring tenderly. ‘Where will I take you my child? I have ruined your life.’

She dropped to her knees weeping and clung to his feet. ‘Master-da, do not leave me behind.’ Bhola was right by her side. How could he look so calm?

‘Come,’ said Master-da and led her out by the hand. They made their way out with Bhola leading the way through the undergrowth. The soldiers had formed a ring around the house and were firing at the windows on the top floor. A rustle of a slushy pile of leaves under an old mango tree, and a bullet tore through the dark. Bhola fell without a sound. She was being pulled away. Dazed, she stumbled behind Master-da.

There were shots still coming from the window upstairs ... Nirmal-da was not dead yet, but in trying to penetrate the cordon Abhimanyu⁶ had fallen. Ram Krishna had said: get to know Bhola well. Was there any need for her to have got to know him so well? His laughter would forever ring in her ears. Did he have to leap to his death before her eyes? Please God, she begged, don’t weigh me down with any more intimate memories.

ANGUS KENNEDY

Cameron had acted contrary to all instructions and orders as to how to conduct these searches. The sub-inspector and the Gurkha havaldar had fled for help leaving the seven Gurkha sepoy to keep watch.

‘It is not his job to do it personally – the police sub-inspector and escort are

meant to do it, while they are covered and protected by the cordon of our men,’ fumed Angus. Thirty sepoy now ringed the site. A Lewis gun had been positioned. The district magistrate, the police superintendent and a couple of Intelligence Bureau officers were due to arrive. The rains had washed away the tracks to Dhalghat, which added to their delay. The sky was lightening and Angus noted with satisfaction the dense undergrowth and the flooded tracts. No one could possibly have left the premises.

‘Come out of the house. We are going to blow it up,’ the police sub-inspector announced over the megaphone.

A widow and two children made their way out.

‘Who else is in there?’

‘Don’t know.’

The Lewis gun took over. Within minutes, most of the walls had been reduced to a pile of rubble. It was safe to go in. Cameron’s body lay behind on the northern side of the premises where the outside stairs had been. He had been shot through the throat and chest. Death had been instantaneous. ‘Poor Cameron,’ said Angus as he laid his fingers on the lifeless wrist, ‘it was plucky, but very foolhardy.’

The house was being searched. A body lay upstairs – the murderer of Cameron. It was identified as Nirmal Sen’s. The little recruit rifleman who had bagged him had shown great coolness and pluck. Among the items found were revolvers and cartridges, three wristwatches, two bomb strikers, two photographs of the Chandpur murderer – Ram Krishna Biswas, a book entitled Leon Trotsky which had within its pages the photographs of two girls,⁷ and three exercise books, one of which contained an article: INDIA AND THE REVOLUTIONARIES.⁸

The widow – Savitri Chakraborty – and the children were continuing to maintain their stance: they had no clue about the identity or the number of people that came and went. The girl had turned out to be a married fourteen-year-old. Her husband would have to be worked upon to convince her into giving evidence. A sepoy called out to Angus. A second body had been found. It lay in the undergrowth on a route that led from the house. So there had been more of them and they had tried to escape. How many, he wondered, had succeeded in making it through the flooded fields. Hicks was ordering a search of the area – the jungle needed to be cut and the weeds removed. The pools would have to be cleared of

their dense green water hyacinth cover and dragged.⁹ Angus turned to Hands who stood silently by his side. 'We cannot fire till we're fired at, and it means that if one does corner an armed terrorist, who is determined to sell his life dearly, he will bag at least one loyal government servant, soldier or policeman every time. All we ask is that we may be allowed to fire into the house first¹⁰ – after the usual procedure of calling out the inmates and questioning them has been gone through, of course.'

MAHENDRA CHOUDHURY

The roads to Dhalghat had all been blocked. Crowds thronged the haats and now and then a scrap of information made its way through. Two bodies were being evacuated. It was said that both had been those of revolutionaries and that one could have passed off as that of a giant. Mahendra had heard enough. He moved away from the crowds. When Manilal Dutt, who lived as a residential tutor in Dhalghat, arrived in the dead of the night with Master-da and the new person, he had been very excited. He had assumed it spelt the beginning of a new mission.

He made his way through Jeshtapur village to the outskirts. A flooded field lay before him making the hut in the distance appear like a boat out at sea. He waded through the water and when it came up to his chest, the easier option was to swim. Sushil De had found them this shelter and Master-da had named it Kutir. The landlord was the village doctor's compounder and his wife had dedicated herself to caring for the young men that came and went. She knew the ropes, never asked a question and in fact bestowed names of her own choosing upon each one.

'Thakur-Da is waiting for you upstairs,' Lady Macbeth, for that was what Master-da had chosen to call her, said. She was pounding the masalas for the day, working tirelessly as she always did. He would have to find some money for her soon. How this woman managed to cook and clean and keep the boys in her charge fed and comfortable was a wonder. She had looked after Tarakeshwar, when he had typhoid, without a thought for her own life or that of her family's. The newcomer lay on a mat covered from head to foot with a sheet, giving in now and then to bouts of violent shivering. The female form dressed in a man's

shirt pulled over a sari pleated into a dhuti and the attempts at hiding long hair with the help of a length of cloth had not escaped his notice or for that matter Lady Macbeth's. But she had, without question, named the newcomer Notunda.¹¹

Master-da appeared to have aged overnight. His skin had shrivelled and sunken eyes glinted deep inside his head. He shivered as he saw Mahendra and moaned slightly. Tears spilled over before he could avert his face. 'I have lost my right arm. I have never needed him as much as I do now.'

EIGHTEEN

KALPANA DUTT

Priti lay in her bed clutching at Kalpana's hand. They did not speak.

Master-da had forced her to come back home. Not even Savitri Devi knows your real identity, he had said. Go back now. Apply for a job. Remember your father has lost his and you need to support your little brothers and sister. I promise I will have you back when the time comes. Priti had agreed reluctantly and had gone through the motions in a numb and dazed kind of way. Nandan Kanan High School had accepted her as their new headmistress. The police had made their visits. Her photograph had been found at Dhalghat. Be careful, they had said, be careful of whom you associate with. She was too quiet a person to arouse their suspicions. Not the right profile at all.¹ But the watch over Kalpana had been tightened.

'Keu eshechhey ... someone has come.' Priti's little sister peeped round the door.

'Wait. I will see.' Kalpana climbed down quickly from the bed. Priti followed, walking as if she had risen from a sickbed.

A tall youth waited in the abandoned cowshed outside. 'Master-da wants to know how things are with you.' He looked past Kalpana, addressing Priti.

She nodded.

'He will make arrangements for you. I will let you know.'

'Tell Master-da I need to meet him on an urgent matter.' Kalpana interjected.

He gave her a brief glance and left.

Kalpana gazed after him in surprise. Was he retarded? She ran after Priti who

was already on her way back to her room. ‘Did I offend him in some way?’

‘No,’ she said wearily. ‘He is like that. Barely talks.’ She lay down and shut her eyes.

Kalpana clambered up on the bed beside her and stroked her hair. Her eyes wandered over to the exercise books that lay open. Priti had been scribbling as usual: It is sorrow such as I have never known before. His laughter still rings in my ears. Every conversation repeats itself inside my head with new meaning. It was as if he knew, as if he had had a premonition. He knew it was his last chance to say whatever he had to say. I remember him saying that before leaving he wanted to light a fire in Chattogram’s breast. Moromei morey gelo, mukulei, jhorey gelo, praan bhora aasha samadhir pashey ... Died within himself, withered away in the bud, a lifetime of aspirations lie beside the memorial.

ANANTA LAL SINGH

Word had trickled into Alipore Central Jail: there had been an encounter at Dhalghat; Nirmal-da had been martyred. Tall and gentle Nirmal-da, who had chased the giggling Lokenath and beaten him with his umbrella until it had fallen to pieces! All for a boiled egg. It had been stolen from his plate in that split second that he had looked away. The grinning faces had refused to be cowed by rants and threats and it was Lokenath’s puffed out cheeks that had given him away. But Ananta’s association with Nirmal-da went way beyond.

It had been in Nirmal-da’s home that they had assembled on the night of the Paraikora dacoity. The house of Sharashi Mahajan in Potiya thana’s Paraikora village had been targeted; there was no police post within a four-mile radius. Would they have guards during the night? Surely, the male members of the house would put up a resistance. The leaders back then were still inexperienced and many discussions had ensued: in the face of adversity how do people behave ... give in meekly or fight back? It was upbeat youngsters like him who had taken it upon themselves to stop the leaders from falling prey to their fears just like ... like little Tegra and the more thoughtful Rajat and Debu.

Julu-da was leading Ananta and Premananda through the winding lanes of Firingee Bazaar to a double-storeyed house where Nirmal-da lived. A separate entrance led to his room. They were to help carry the weapons and instruments ... large hammers, wrenches, files to cut iron with, axes and shovels ... that had been stored here. But Julu-da drew Nirmal-da into a corner. Ananta strained to hear. The last of the team members, the biggest and the strongest, had failed to show up. He was the one they were depending on.

‘Does he know exactly where we are to go?’ Ananta broke in on their deliberations.

‘No, he only knows the spot on the river bank where I was to pick him up.’

‘Then he can’t betray us. Let’s go.’

They had crossed the river and embarked on a fifteen-mile trek; changed into lungis and skull caps and put on their make-up.

Members slipped into position covering every path that led to the house. Julu-da broke the door open and stepped in to the courtyard, revolver in hand.

The Paraikora dacoity had an amusing fallout. It was around ten o’clock when the news was flashed. Baba was in his office room surrounded by clients. The news was spreading like lightning and like a bahurupia, its description changed by the hour. First, there were forty people on forty cycles with forty torches and forty revolvers; all of Paraikora village had been looted. Then forty armed people had looted Sharashi Mahajan’s house ... many had been killed and Rs 75,000/- worth of goods had been taken away. Then came more elaborate versions. The Panchojanya reported: A unique bold dacoity, forty of them, each one carrying revolvers, ignored the villagers outside and spent two hours in ransacking the house. The villagers were unable to offer any resistance and the dacoits escaped with the loot worth Rs 75,000/-. They broke 78 boxes; injured Sharashi Babu and one more person. The police have found enough clues to arrest the dacoits.

The Panchojanya had a minor typographic error. Instead of seven or eight boxes they wrote seventy eight boxes.

Some fifteen days later Maulvi Siraj-ul-haq and some innocent people, not connected with politics at all, were arrested. With them were Charu Bikash Dutt,

Pratap Rakshit, and some others from their party. Why? Because despite all precautions, the police had figured out that revolvers had been used in the case and therefore it was the work of the swadeshis. To top it all, an anonymous letter had been sent to the police accusing Master-da's group. It proved that it had to be the work of the rival party. In the end, after spending three months in jail Charu Babu and his boys had been let off.

Master-da, Nirmal-da and Julu-da had successfully pulled off their first dacoity. But sadly, it had turned out like the popular joke cracked about doctors: the operation has been successful but the patient has unfortunately died. It had not been Rs 75,000/- that had been taken but Rs 600/-. It could well have been collected from homes of the members.

The following months had been eventful. He had left to study at the Bengal Technical Institution in Kolkata where Ganesh was also a student. But in reality he had spent more time with Julu-da's group. Money had been required and Ananta had returned home to steal, with Didi and Dada's help, Rs 3,000/- from Baba's almirah. Baba had been furious and had threatened to disown him. It had been a great scandal. Ananta had then immersed himself in the plot to kill Police Commissioner Tegart. At the last moment the plan had failed and within a few months, Julu-da had asked him to go back to Chattogram. More money would have to be arranged and Master-da and Nirmal-da were waiting for him. Khoka² had been sent along. From the moment they had got off the train, word of Ananta's arrival had reached Baba's ears. Kindly neighbours who had spotted him had kept him updated. Baba had been furious that he had dared to return. Why doesn't he get a passport and go away to America, he had screamed. Ananta had assured the neighbours that he had come back with the very same intention.

A mess had been the first requirement on the list and soon an abandoned two-storeyed house had been located on the outskirts, three miles from Parade Ground – the Suluk Bahar house which stood in an exclusively Muslim-dominated area. Khoka and Ananta had been the first to move in followed by Rajen Das, Upen Bhattacharya and Nirmal-da. None of them had ever kept house before, for who cared for such things? Though Gopi Nath had forcibly taught Ananta some basic cooking, while at Taltola, he preferred to sneak food in from the local dhabas. Washing up? That was a chore none of them had wished to handle. The dirty plates would usually be left in a pile during the night. One morning they had discovered them spotlessly clean. A discussion had been in

progress regarding the identity of the kindly soul that had taken pity on them when Nirmal-da had pointed to a little stray dog that lay sleepily outside the open door.

He had come up with a plan. Both Ambika-da and Nirmal-da had been cautious. But Master-da had been overcome by his enthusiasm. A second dacoity would be conducted on 14 December 1923, the day when the salaries of the AB Railway workshop staff were to be brought into the city. On the day before the dacoity, Ananta and Khoka had left early to observe the horse-drawn coach as it made its way down the pucca road that ran between the two hills and diverged into the head of a T, one leading to the AB Railway workshop and the other to the city. The plan had been something like this: Ananta would block the road pretending to fiddle with his cycle chain slowing the coach down and then they would attack. As they stood by the side of the road discussing, a man had gone walking past. He had turned to look at Ananta and his face had lit up in recognition. Mr Maklas Rehman, who worked then at the railway workshop, had been their neighbour nearly ten years ago. The next thing on the agenda had been to pay Ma a visit and end the day with a drive in a horse-drawn coach. Those were the days of phaetons and coaches. Cars were few and Chattogram had all but six taxis. That had been the fun part. They had got up on to the coachman's seat and befriended him. Show us how to control the horses, Khoka had begged and the coachman had been only too pleased to give them lessons. Back at Suluk Bahar they had found Nirmal-da and Ambika-da in a serious mood. The boys all wanted to take part! A second meeting with Master-da had followed and the plan slightly modified. Now Nirmal-da was to lead the second team which would comprise of Rajen and Upen. Master-da had opened the almirah, which served as their armoury, and handed out the weapons before leaving with Ambika-da for the night.

They were all up early. It was 14 December. Nirmal-da said he needed a pair of rubber-soled shoes and would be back quickly.

‘The coach will arrive at ten sharp,’ warned Ananta.

‘Bhai, not to worry. I will be there by 9 a.m.’

Ananta and Khoka had taken up their positions. Nine o'clock came and went. A figure appeared. Was it Nirmal-da? With a jolt, Ananta realized it wasn't. It was Mr Maklas Rehman again. Soon it was ten and the coach appeared at the top of

the road. Where was Nirmal-da's team? The coach was nearly upon them. It was too late to move to the centre of the road. Ananta sent his cycle crashing into the middle of the road while he took aim at the coachman's chest.

'Heiiii! Mia! Thamo.'

The coachman's whip came down hard on the horse's back and the animal broke into a canter. Ananta flung himself at the reins pulling with every ounce of muscle. The animal slowed and Khoka screamed out to the passengers.

'Get down every one of you.'

They followed his orders without a murmur. But Nikunja Babu, the head clerk of the AB Railway's workshop, grimly instructed the peon, 'Bring the bags with you.'

Khoka pounced on the peon, throwing him out bodily and leapt up beside Ananta on the coachman's seat. The horse set off as Rajen and Upen came panting up and clambered on board.

'No sign of Nirmal-da! We've been waiting for hours,' they said breathlessly.

The coach was deserted at Parade Ground, the horse turned around so that it faced the opposite direction and the four dacoits struggled to make off with the four bags. The ones with the notes were manageable but the one with the coins was not. They could not possibly abandon it and as they ran, a few coins spilled out on to the road and were picked up by the puzzled people passing by. They made it safely into the house, where Ambika-da was waiting, and sat down to quickly count the money: fifteen thousand rupees bundled neatly according to denominations. The money was packed into a suitcase and Ambika-da left with it.

The police would arrive any moment now. The boys went up to the second floor to take up their positions. They would go down gloriously like Joteen Mookerjee. Seconds ticked by. Minutes turned into hours. Nobody turned up. What a let-down. They had been too tense to think of food or drink. It was seven in the evening when Master-da came in. He had been restraining himself all day, pretending it was just another day at school. It had been the students that had broken the news. But he had forced himself to wait patiently for the details.

‘Ambika Babu will leave for Kolkata tomorrow carrying half the money. I will send Dalil Rehman along with the other half. Where is Nirmal Babu, by the way?’

Ambika-da returned within the week. The money had been safely handed over in Kolkata.

‘How did you carry it?’ asked Master-da?

‘In a hollowed-out copy of the Mahabharata and a dictionary,’ he smiled. ‘And, by the way,’ he added, ‘Nirmal Babu had locked his weapon in his almirah and gone down to the pukur for a quick bath. When he came back, he discovered he had lost the key. And now he is too ashamed to show his face!’

Shaheed Nirmal Sen, whose life had ended in a blaze of glory, had always quoted his own example unabashedly when teaching youngsters about the importance of punctuality.

KALPANA DUTT

‘Didi has gone.’

‘Why?’

‘Because the police came.’

‘Again?’

Priti’s sister, Kanak,³ the one immediately after her was turning out as fearless as Priti herself. Kalpana drew her indoors. ‘Tell me what happened?’

‘They came for a sample of her handwriting. They took away her songbook. She asked me to give you this.’ The girl slipped fifty rupees into Kalpana’s hands.

She didn’t need to ask. It was Priti’s contribution to Master-da’s fund. Five hundred rupees were required and they had still been fifty short.

‘But ...’

‘Didi said she has catered for the household expenses.’

‘But your father ... what will he do? He has no job?’

The child’s eyes gleamed fiercely. ‘You don’t want our money because we are poor?’ She turned to leave. ‘Bhulu-di, don’t come to our house again. Baba has asked me never to speak with you again. He will tell the police if you come.’

Baba was calling. Ma came into the room to call Kalpana out. The DIB inspector had arrived. Kalpana was not surprised.

‘Such a quiet girl ... gentle and well spoken. She has completely outwitted us.’ Inspector Jogendra Gupta⁴ was sitting with Baba. They looked up as Kalpana came in.

‘Your friend! She has disappeared,’ Baba said. ‘Inspector babu went to arrest her today and found her gone. And you,’ his voice took on a menacing tone, ‘will not set one foot out of this house. Do you hear me? Inspector babu will come everyday to check on you. Now go back to your room.’

Kalpana’s mind had begun to race: 5 July 1932, Priti’s life in the underground had begun. The days that followed were ones filled with waiting. Priti had gone and there was no word from the group. The hours stretched and grew, measured out by inspector babu’s visits. Then the police superintendent of Kumilla was murdered. Everyone, from the newspaper to Baba, to inspector babu and the servants, began discussing it endlessly. Mr Ellison, who had been aggressively rounding up suspects, had been shot dead. He had been cycling back from work along his usual route on 29 July when it happened. There were no witnesses. It was a mystery that Revolutionary Bengal would discuss for years. To whom would they award the credit?⁵ A spate of arrests had followed and two Chattogram lads featured amongst them: Saroj Kanti Guha arrested on 3 August from the district of Noakhali where he was working as a residential tutor under the name of Sailesh Chandra Roy on four rupees per month and Hemendu Dastidar, alias Boro-khoka, on 28 August, caught while coming out of the mess in 130 Maniktala Street. It had not ended there.

TERRORIST FAILS

Shot Fired at Editor.

Assailant Commits Suicide.

CALCUTTA, 5 Aug

A terrorist attempted to assassinate Sir Alfred Watson, editor of the Calcutta Statesman this afternoon. As he was motoring to his office yard from Chowringhee, the main thoroughfare, a Bengali youth fired a revolver through a side window. The bullet missed Sir Alfred Watson's head by a few inches smashing a rear window. The youth, who was overpowered by the watchman, swallowed poison and died on the way to hospital.⁶

TERRORISTS ACTIVE IN INDIA

OFFICIALS ARMED DAY AND NIGHT

CALCUTTA. Saturday 6 August

Terrorist activity has become so intensified in India in the past few weeks, that Government officials and police in country districts, especially in East Bengal, are working in dangerous, nerve-racking conditions. They are compelled to carry revolvers night and day. Their houses and offices are constantly guarded. It is believed that there will be increased attempts on the lives of the British in the near future.

A gunman, apparently instructed by the Chittagong headquarters of the terrorist organizations, has stated that there will be more frequent shootings, without discrimination, of police officials and civilians.⁷

The newspaper-wallahs were back in business.

KALI KINKAR DE

Shadowy figures flitted about on a char. Well before dawn, a small boat made its way back ashore. Shaileshwar Chakraborty had been buried.

The widow had a small fire going and was waiting with an iron griddle and a bunch of neem leaves. She silently held them out as the young men reached out, symbolically touching the fire and the iron before picking up a neem leaf and tearing at it with their teeth. If a spirit from the other world had followed them home, it would have to return. 'Go,' she said. 'I have drawn up some water. Bathe and leave your clothes on the side. I will wash them.'

As Mahendra Choudhury sloshed water over himself, Kali Kinkar awaited his turn in silence. The bizarre outcome of the previous day's plans had left him shaken.

The Assam Bengal Railway Institute at Pahartali was surrounded by hills. Overlooking the road that led up to the institute stood the Auxiliary Armoury at one end and the Hawkins Club at the other. Like every evening, the armed patrol had trooped out of the gates of the armoury and prepared to march up and down the road until dawn. Each round took them some ten or fifteen minutes. Shaileshwar led the team carefully through the shadows. Entry to unauthorized Indians was strictly forbidden, save for the ones who worked at the armoury workshop or served in the institute. Nor was the road open to private or unauthorized vehicles. And yet they had made it to the gates. But a delay had taken place.

Shaileshwar and Kali Kinkar carried .455 bore Webleys. A sword and a revolver hung from Shanti Chakraborty's belt; in his pocket was a bomb which was to be ignited with the help of lotion and in his hands an aluminium alloy shell filled with a potent combination of ammon picrate and potash chlorate fitted with a

striker designed to burst on impact. The boys positioned themselves behind the bushes of the main gate on the eastern side.

The plan was this: Shanti would throw the bomb fitted with the striker followed by the one with the lotion. This would burst four or five seconds after the first one and, in the meantime, he would put his revolver to use and then pull out the sword to strike down anyone running past.

Sushil De and Mahendra Choudhury carried police muskets with their barrels cut short, a cast iron bomb with a striker and a lotion bomb each.

Waiting at the northern end, ready to attack the billiards room, were Bireshwar Roy with a Webley, Pannalal with a musket and Gamma with a dagger in his belt and two bombs in his hand.

A fourth team made up of Dinesh Chakraborty and Deenbandhu Majumdar waited at a distance with pamphlets in their hands. The moment they heard the bombs go off they would run to where Shanti Ranjan Sen and Payaj Kanti Choudhury were waiting. Their teams would then take over the job of distributing the pamphlets all over the city.

Shaileshwar had planned it carefully. He had wrenched permission out of Master-da to look for an opportunity insisting that he had not taken part in any action since Jalalabad. And when Jayadrath, who had recently been transferred to the Railway Institute, offered one, Shaileshwar had jumped at it. We are not in hiding to save our hides, he would say, but to be able to continue with the guerrilla warfare. They had succeeded in laying their hands on a copy of the Railway Institute's programme and had chosen the busiest day in the week – 10 August 1932.

But it was the delay that had worked out so expensive. Jayadrath's signal did not come. They were on their way back when Shaileshwar said something that was to embed itself in Kali's memory forever: I heard Ma call to me. And answer I did. But it seems that I am not good enough to be sacrificed at her altar.

The boys had broken up into groups and made their way to their respective shelters. Shaileshwar had returned with Kali and Mahendra to the Jayadrath shelter. That night he had tossed and turned, unable to sleep. His restlessness had kept them both awake. Finally, he sat up on the cot. Kali, he said, give me some paper and a pencil. Kali, who was lying on the ground, reached out and then

watched Shaileshwar scribble: Days are gone. Life is growing more and more vague and vacant.

He had passed his English honours and had got his BA degree ... there was a streak of a poet in him. Kali's eyes closed with exhaustion. He wished Shaileshwar would sleep.

It was the terrible gurgling that had woken him. He has taken the cyanide, Mahendra had shrieked. They had forced his mouth open and removed the remnants of the capsule from his tongue. But instead of killing instantly, the cyanide took its time. The agonizing sucking of air through fluid-filled lungs went on and on. Tucked beneath his pillow was a letter addressed to Master-da.⁸

Jayadrath had returned from work in the morning. He had taken the decision that Shaileshwar would have to be buried and as silently as possible. The news could not leak out ... it would affect morale. They had waited until nightfall. The widow had collected a few flowers and lit some incense. Kali had placed a sword beneath the head before they covered the grave.⁹

NINETEEN

ANANDA PRASAD GUPTA, 15 AUGUST 1932

1

The descriptive roll listed their identification features and misdeeds. Ananda and Sahayram responded to their names. They were being called in pairs. The salt wind abrasive against his cheeks, Ananda lurched up the gangway, pulling tightly at the iron ring in his hands to keep the chain that looped through it taut. The ends of the chain had been riveted earlier that day to the rings around the ankles – ‘securely ironed’ was the term they had used. The superintendent of Alipore Jail, who now stood on the deck with the commander of the vessel overseeing the handing and taking over, had personally inspected the fetters ensuring they were secure, rust-free and of the regulated weight and pattern. They now stood before the officer commanding the guard who scanned their documents and transfer warrants before getting down to examining their fetters once again.

The steamer ‘Maharaja’ was to take them to the Andamans. For months the penal colony had protested against reopening the penal settlement and accepting once again the responsibility for political prisoners. But Stanley Jackson’s parting blow had delivered a captain’s knock, which was being pursued vociferously by the new governor, Sir John Anderson. Intent to murder was to attract the same punishment as murder itself. After nearly five months of the sentencing, the Government of India had got its way and the first batch of political prisoners being made to cross the Kala Pani was the Chittagong group.

He was being driven across the deck towards a booby hatch that opened into a dark yawning pit. A dread lodged deep within Ananda. The throb of the ship and the darkening horizon seemed to draw him towards inevitable ruin. He turned his head for one last look. Bengal, rain-washed and sorrowful, would soon pull out of sight and grow fainter by the minute. The mist was already lying down in

quick lithe ribbons, rapidly obscuring all vision. Rough hands turned him around, pushing him down into the darkness. He groped blindly, stumbling down the ladder, struggling with the details of home, the twisted streets of Chittagong, faces so haunting and beloved. Could his memories be torn away as easily?

An arm rested companionably around his shoulder. Ananta-da was drawing him to a side. 'Even a sad day like this one can be enjoyed if you remember that we are all together. After being away at different jails for nearly six months we have been brought together again. You will see ... hoi-hoi-roi-roi korey the days will pass as if it were a picnic.'

Smiles and chatter broke out all around him. Dim lights showed up whitewashed walls and iron bars. The lower deck had the prison fitted within it. They were going to be together. With Ananta-da, Ganesh-da and Loka-da at the helm, the passage would be reduced to laughter, teasing, singing and dramatizing little stories. It would be hoi-hoi-roi-roi all the way.

There was no dinner to be had for they had been fed before the embarkation. The Indian doctor who was the superintendent of convicts arrived. Two boys were identified and a red cloth stripe fixed on the sleeves of their right arms just above the wrist. They had been appointed warders. The latrines were on the deck above and there would be two supervised visits everyday. The journey would take a total of six days and they would get an hour of fresh air on the deck in the mornings and in the evenings.

The superintendent left. It was time to settle down. A night of singing seemed to be in order but Ananda had a question that had played on his mind for many years. Shyly, he whispered to Ananta-da, 'Master-da had a wife, did he not?'

All ears had pricked up suddenly.

Ananta-da smiled. 'I will tell you Master-da's story as I have heard it. There is a whole storehouse of stories you boys don't know about. But let me tell it my way.

'Master-da was preparing for his BA finals at Krishnanath College, Behrampore, in 1916, when he was first introduced to politics by fellow students. By the time he finished his exams, he knew his destiny. But an immediate crisis faced him. A gentleman in the village had funded his education on the understanding that he would marry his daughter. There was no way that the relatives or the villagers

would let him go. Yet marrying is against the code of the revolutionaries for Anandomoth not only prescribes celibacy, it actually shuns women. Preparations for the wedding were in full swing; the groom was brought to the bride's house but with him came his guru. The two had been to the Chhateshwari Temple to seek blessings before the wedding rituals could begin. The in-laws were impressed but what they did not know was that it had been the initiation. The wedding took place and the next day, the bride was brought to her matrimonial home. She stepped into the pan of milk and aalta, leaving her footprints along the floor as she walked in, carrying a live fish in her hands. She was Lokkhi incarnate bringing prosperity into her new home. The bedroom had been strung with flowers and the sheets strewn with scented petals. Pushpo Kuntala Devi was a woman of startling beauty. But the first thing Master-da said to her was, "I am a swadeshi. There can be no compromise between conjugal life and swadeshi life." Pushpo Boudi's heart was broken. Her bitter tears would not move her husband. She had been relegated to a life of shame and taunts. Her husband would stay away from the village for months. Sometimes he would send a letter. But there was never any money.

'I saw her first when I was arrested, months after my escape from the Nagarkhana Hill battle site, by Prafulla Roy. Master-da and Ambika-da were already in jail. They had been found unconscious at the site for the cyanide they had consumed had either deteriorated with time or had been spurious. We would be taken to court daily. Those were the heydays of Taracharan Sadhu. How can any of us forget him?'

Everybody remembered. Ananda would never forget that stab of fear when his father threatened to extract information about the stolen necklace with the help of the sadhu's psychic powers.

'My parents had gone to consult him and he had sat with his eyes shut. All he said was, "khalaas, khalaas, khalaas". They assumed that we would be freed and quite freakishly that is what happened. Jatindra Mohan Sengupta² mounted such a defence that the police, from the superintendent down to the junior constable and the witnesses fumbled and ended up eating their own words. All of Chittagong, white and Bengali, had been left stunned. It was in those days that I saw Pushpo Boudi stand with my parents amongst the crowd as the van took us back and forth.

'Master-da and Ambika-da had been charged with the Suluk Bahar House

Collection of Arms Case and the Nagarkhana Hill Battle. I had only the AB Railway Dacoity to my name. Of course you remember I had once told you that that the initial collection of arms had been done through private purchase and stolen from the armoury of the maharaja of Tripura. Now Jatindra Mohan Babu threw in the final twist: The prosecution has charged my clients under Section 19F. It can only be applied to cases in which arms have been stolen from the government's armoury. What part of British India have these been stolen from? Who was responsible for their charge? There is nothing in writing. We have to dismiss this case.

‘Mr Stork, the zila judge in those days, sat with his mouth hanging open and Rai Satish Chandra Bahadur who was a lawyer on the prosecution's team described the subsequent events to me: “I went to the jailor, Mr Sashby, and announced the news. It took the wind out of him. Oh! What? What? Acquitted? Acquitted? He gulped like a gold fish.”

‘Master-da and Ambika-da were free to go. We thought the jail staff would be pleased for us but instead there were long faces: the officers have come to know that a large amount of arms and ammunition have found their way into the jail. This is nonsense, I yelled. They just want some pretext to hold us back. But cold dread was sinking in. After all, we had not been sitting quietly all those last nine months. We had no clue J.M. Sengupta would be able to swing this one for us. So with Master-da's and Ambika-da's permission I had roped in, rather charmed and bribed, jail workers and got keys imprinted, a bomb, a pistol and cartridges smuggled in. Three warders had helped out thinking they were the only ones involved. My dada was helping from the other side. The convict, who swept the floors, was a notorious fellow and he had taught me how to hide weapons inside the cell. You remember how high the roof was? Nearly eighteen feet? Well, he taught me an ingenious way of clambering up without a ladder. Between the wall and the roof there was a four-inch gap!’ Ananta-da licked his lips lost in his memories. ‘But that day I was in panic. The fellow on duty was a Muslim and I did not trust him, though he was the one who had had the keys imprinted. Should I trust him or should I not? I took a piece of paper and marked it with an X. Then I prayed to Ma: if you want me to trust him, let this paper fall with the X pointing upwards. It did. Later Master-da scolded me: “You and your lottery! You are gambling with life and death!” But by then the arms had reached Premananda who had delivered them to my dada.

‘But the pistol had been loaded and retained. We kept it in the kitchen during the

day, where we went for our meals and Master-da would slip it into his waist before going back to the cell for the night. We were supposed to be routinely searched but the jail staff had become so used to us that they had dispensed with the formality. One day a new warder came from Kumilla. He went by the book and asked the head jamadar to frisk us. He was one of the people we bribed regularly but he had not been told about the pistol. I was searched and then Ambika-da. Then when he moved towards Master-da I panicked. I jumped up and embraced the jamadar. Arrey, sipahi-ji, kya karta hai? What are you doing? Master-ji hum log sab ka burra, Unko sab puja kartey hain. Chaliye chaliye ho gaya Master-ji ka. The jamadar looked shamefaced. After all Master-da was revered by one and all. The warder did not object and we made it to our cells without letting a single breath fall.

‘The plan was that once Master-da and Ambika-da were released, I would escape. So much happened in those few days. Sub-inspector Prafulla Roy was shot on 24 May 1924 and he named Premananda in his dying declaration. Premananda was brought into jail and kept in the segregation ward with murderers awaiting trial. We could not meet him, for our kitchens were separate. Ordinary convicts cooked for us in those days. That changed only after Jatin Das died. Anyway, I tried to get in touch with him through a letter written in cipher. A seasoned, hardened inmate worked as the toilet basket cleaner and he took the note across. But what he brought back drove me into shock. Premananda had written: Dear brother, Can you send me some cyanide? I want to commit suicide. I do not want to live because you suspect me. Please send the poison. What was this? When did I suspect him? And why? I only had good feelings towards him. I was very hurt. I showed Master-da the letter. He read it carefully. Then he made a strange suggestion which I did not understand. But I did not question him.

‘I wrote back: Dada, I am very sad. How did you get this idea? Please wipe it from your mind. We have heard that Lord Lytton is coming here after his Dhaka tour. He has gone to see Santosh-da in Darjeeling Jail. Maybe he will come to meet us. He made bad suggestions about Bengal’s women. He has fallen in people’s eyes. All the local dailies have been sharp in their criticism. So if we can kill him now it will fulfil the desires of the people. I have brought a pistol into the jail. If you want I can send it. But please do not take cyanide.

‘The reply was even stranger: Ananta Lal, I can see that you have become too clever. I understand your motives. You have sent this to test me. You want to see the effect this letter will have on the jail authorities. Will they start searching the

jail? Do not think that I am a fool. I know you do not have any pistol with you right now. Do not try to be too clever.

‘I was in deep anguish. Had I but a chance I would have rushed to embrace him and reassure him. But Master-da took a different stance. Why is Premananda thinking like this? Why did he think this was a test? Why had he met Prafulla day after day before shooting him? I simply could not understand what Master-da was driving at.

‘Then the day came when Master-da and Ambika-da were released. We will be back soon, within minutes in fact, they said before leaving. They had expected to be rearrested under the Number 3 regulation at the jail gate. But strangely, it did not happen. I asked Kali Ma to suggest a good day for escaping. And then I was ready. The pistol had been left behind with me. Dada came with his friends in the middle of the night and waited outside. They were to throw a wooden hook with an attached rope on to the wall of my ward. Unfortunately, it landed on the tin roof of a toilet in another ward. There was a huge commotion but it was the inmates of that ward who came under suspicion. And I remained in jail.

‘My trial began. Barrister S.L. Khastagir and Advocate Rajani Biswas were defending me. The prosecution’s entire case was based on the fact that Mr Maklas Rehman had come upon me and seen me face-to-face at the site. The police were so confident that they did not carry out an identification check beforehand. My parents and lawyers secretly met with the witness and the next day in court he stood in the box and said, “Yes, I saw Ananta Lal Singh at the site.” “And is it the accused in the dock,” Mr Stork asked. Mr Maklas Rehman looked at me and said: “No. That’s not the Ananta Lal Singh I know.” Now it all depended on Nikunja Babu, the AB Railway’s head clerk, who had been present and in charge of the money. But he fumbled during cross-examination. That was it and all Chattogram began singing the praises of the psychic, Taracharan Baba.

‘I was free but I had to get Premananda out. Shama Charan, an IB constable, had given a statement that Prafulla had sent him to Premananda to deliver a message regarding the time and place of the appointment. One of our boys delivered a warning to Shama Charan. He would have to change the statement and say that the meeting was held the day before the murder took place. But the really dangerous witness was the government lawyer, Rai Satish Chandra Bahadur, who was present while the dying declaration was being recorded. Fortunately, Premananda’s name had been mistakenly spelt as Pramananda. But Satish Babu

was witness to the fact that Prafulla had mentioned Harish Babu as the father of his assailant. I needed to speak with Satish Babu but he knew me well. So I went in disguise. The next day I heard him speak to my Baba: “Golab Babu, ki shorbonash! Such a large revolver on my chest! I think there were two of them ... they told me that if I confirmed Prafulla’s words that Harish Dutt is the father of the assailant, they will shoot Chandrashekhar.” Chandrashekhar Babu was Satish Babu’s favourite and famous son ... the high court advocate in Kolkata. It was too much for the old man and it worked. Satish Babu toed the line. Jatindra Mohan Sengupta faced the prosecution’s lawyer and blew the case out of court. The government refused to concede their loss and Premananda continued in jail under some pretext or the other.

‘While all this was taking place Anushilan and Jugantar set up meetings on the second floor of the Collegiate School. Pramod Ranjan Choudhury, my friend who had joined Anushilan, had successfully led a dacoity. We were all working towards the same goal. Why could we not work together? Charu Babu and Master-da agreed to cooperate.’

Ganesh-da made a wry face. ‘That was the last time Anushilan and Jugantar worked together. The understanding fell apart by 1929. But, Ananta, where did Pushpo Boudi’s story get lost?’

‘My way!’ Ananta-da held up both his hands.

‘Bolo, Ananta-da, bolo!’ There was a chorus of voices.

‘I was still in bed when the police arrived. It was in the predawn hours and we were all surprised. I was certain they were confusing us with Pramod’s dacoity. Ma had made the same assumption. She was screaming herself hoarse: “This cannot be ... Taking Ananta without him having committed a crime ... he has not been out of the house in the day or in the night. I will not permit it. I have kept an eye on him all the time ... it was impossible for him to commit any dacoity ... I will not let you take him away.”

‘How Ma would stop them ... that I did not know. But her agitation held the police at the door for a while. In the meanwhile, my cousin Shakuntala hid a bomb and a pistol within her sari; Ma tucked one within the folds of hers; Didi poured the caps into the big homeopathy pill container box. Police Superintendent Lyannard had come personally, Mr Shallow having been posted

out for having failed to secure enough proof against us. Our neighbour and advocate, Rajani Biswas, had been brought along as a witness. Through him, Baba was told that the police would go away immediately after searching the house; that they were asking for me and that I should meet them. I went and sat in the living room and Mr Lyannard immediately said, “1 October 1924. No. 1 Regulation of the Bengal Ordinance; I am arresting you.” I had stepped into their trap. There was no way out. Liar! I began shouting. You are a liar ... you have come not to search the house but to arrest me. Lyannard’s face turned red. I did not know then that the word liar was construed as so great an abuse amongst the whites. He swallowed and said: “Yes, the house will also be searched.”

‘But it was true that they had wilfully hidden the truth and lied to me. Lord Lytton’s ordinance permitting detention for a six-month period without trial had been a well-kept secret. It had been prompted by the series of outrages:

‘1923 Paraikora dacoity – the first dacoity in Chattogram ... that was us.

‘May 1923 – a dacoity and murder.

‘May 1923 – Ultodanga post office dacoity.

‘August 1923 – Shankharitola post office dacoity and murder.

‘December 1923 – Chattogram AB Railway Dacoity ... us again. We were hiding out those days in the Suluk Bahar House, waiting for the police to arrive and give us our final glorious battle. But what we had not realized was the sensation it had caused in Chattogram at that time. The police, despite having visited my house within a few days, could not believe that I could have pulled off something like that. Mr Maklas Rehman had said he had known me and had seen me at the site. But he had not actually witnessed the event. And the people in the coach, including the head clerk and the coachman, did not really know me. In fact, when my father had described the police visit to his colleagues in court, Rai Satish Chandra Bahadur actually said: “No, no, Golab Babu, this cannot have been done by our dal and shoontki-eating Chattogram lads. They don’t have the nerve. These have to be outsiders. Why, if it is any of our boys I will draw them to my chest with pride.” But the police eventually took us by surprise on 24 December 1923 and we fled into the Nagarkhana Hills. They discovered the arms we had left behind and made two cases out of it – the Suluk Bahar

House Collection of Arms Case and the Nagarkhana Hill Battle. Though Master-da and Ambika-da were caught, I succeeded in escaping with Khoka and Upen. But they did not accuse Master-da and Ambika-da of being a part of the AB Railway Dacoity.

‘On 12 January 1924 – Sir Charles Tegart was the target but Gopi Nath Saha got Mr Day instead by mistake. I had been a part of the first plot but it had failed and I had been sent back from Kolkata while Julu-da planned it a second time with Gopi. Gopi pumped several bullets into Earnest Day to make sure he did a clean job and ended up getting caught and hanged. And Tegart got away again. I tell you the man is the devil himself.

‘24 May 1924 – Chattogram Sub-inspector Prafulla Roy murder.’

There was a prompt show of hands again.

‘24 August 1924 – the bomb blast in the Swadeshi Agency, a khaddar shop on Mirzapur Street, which killed the helper, Prakash Chandra Banik. The truth was the owner, one Sishir Kumar, had opened it with a loan from the government and used it to spy on the revolutionaries. He introduced himself as a friend of Santosh-da’s, to Anukul-da. But Anukul-da figured he was a fraud. The police report led everyone to believe that revolutionaries had attacked the ahimsavadi Congress workers.

‘The police were now out to get Master-da. While Ganesh, Ambika-da and I had walked into their arms, Nirmal-da and Master-da had succeeded in giving them the slip. Nirmal-da was picked up some months later but of Master-da there was no trace. He had disappeared into the depths of Kolkata. A small bomb-manufacturing unit had been set up in Dakshineswar while some of the members took up residence on the third floor of a very large house in Shobha Bazaar. They cooked for themselves ... some went to college, some to work, some were looking for work ... that was the way they introduced themselves. They were working steadily and confidently, unaware that a traitor lived amongst them. One day the police carried out simultaneous raids on both Shobha

Bazaar and the bomb-making unit.

‘It was 10 November 1925; the night was not yet over when the police arrived. At that time Master-da, Ananta Chakraborty, Pramod Ranjan Choudhury and many others were in the Shobha Bazaar house. Remember that this was the phase in which Anushilan and Jugantar were cooperating. The first sounds that alerted them were the whispering and the soft tread of boots. It was getting closer. Within seconds, their plan was finalized. Master-da would have to be saved. That was the priority. Pramod, Ananta Chakraborty and a few others put their full body weight against the door as the blows began to fall ... lathis, boots and rifle butts. The warnings were being called: “Open up or else we will fire.” Our side was calling back: “What is the hurry, babu? Are we going anywhere? It is still dark. At least give us a moment to wake up and get going.” The door was opened finally. The police flashed huge torches. “Where is Surjya Sen?” Everybody looked puzzled and indignant. What were the police talking about? Meanwhile, Master-da was walking down the riverside. He had squeezed his way out of the bathroom window and slipped down the drainpipe.

‘I was in Barddhaman³ Jail and Ganesh was in Presidency. Both of us were making plans to break out. But we were not in touch with each other. Suren Babu, a political prisoner from the Madaripur group with whom I was sharing the cell, was a complete stranger as far as I was concerned. I would have to get myself to the jail in which Julu-da was being held and then we could plan together.

‘Baba came to see me and said, “Hain rey, why do you behave badly when you see the police? Why not behave well and get along with them? It may help you get what you want and it doesn’t cost money. Not that I am asking you to give up your code but the path you have chosen requires determination and if you come across as a calm gentle person it will only increase the respect you will get.”

‘His words worked like magic. Soon the IB officers and I became great friends. Some became my kaka babus; some jaithamoshais. I pretended I had turned over a new leaf and was ready to give out all I knew. I created a lovely story which I related with great relish: the team is run by five people whose names and identities are not known to any of us. We know them as Bor-da, Mej-da, Sej-da, Lomba-da, etc. But Julu-da ... he knows their names. Now if only Julu-da could be brought here, I could cleverly worm the names out of him. But for that, Suren Babu who is being kept with me ... he will have to be transferred from this jail

and then Julu-da and I should share a cell.

‘Julu-da arrived. “I have been told that you are acting up and that my presence is required to drive some sense into your head,” he said. I laughed and told him my story. We would now escape together. The look on his face! I will never forget it! “You think you are indispensable?” He barked at me. “You think the revolution will fall flat without you? Do you think that the ones that are outside are sitting around doing nothing?” I was thunderstruck. The question of escape was out. Julu-da, I learnt, had counselled Ganesh against escaping as well.

‘I continued with my pretence of having reformed and spent my time studying. I had developed a new passion: why do meticulously planned conspiracies fail? It was an interesting study, for I learnt that though the police claim brilliant breakthroughs, it was invariably thanks to an insider, a trusted revolutionary who had turned traitor. There was a time when the revolutionaries, having recognized the problem, began killing everyone that betrayed them. Next came a stage in which whenever a member left the party or expressed his wish to quit, he was killed instantly. But this necessary step had been introduced after many plans had failed. We, I realized, would now have to find a way of weeding out prospective traitors well in advance.

‘I was moved to Jessore Jail. Premananda had been there until a few days ago but was now under house arrest in his home at Chattogram. But I got to meet Charu Babu. He spoke of the last couple of meetings with Master-da, which took place after my arrest, and how rewarding they had been. Together they had decided to put a council together with Sachin Sanyal as president. Bengal and ten zilas of Assam would be targeted and the armouries were to be attacked. But the police detectives were on to them and Sachin Sanyal was arrested. The secrets of the Kakori Conspiracy were revealed and Julu-da and Charu Babu had, as a result, been arrested. But Master-da and some of his workers had evaded arrest and continued with the work. Then came the next blow. I sat listening dumbly to Charu Babu. Traitors! Revolutionaries who had turned into police agents infiltrated our groups. Insiders! The police conceal their identities. That day I discovered Premananda’s secret. He had confessed. He was the one who had betrayed me and told Prafulla where and when to catch me. But then the guilt had become too much for him to bear. Everybody was suspecting him. To make matters right, he had murdered Prafulla Roy and prepared to hang for it. The entire episode with Premananda became clear and I understood at last what Master-da had been muttering. And that was why Premananda thought I was

testing him. After his trial, Premananda had been sent home on house arrest but reports were that he was losing his mind. The family then sent him to the mental asylum at Ranchi. No man has been known to have returned from there.'

It was a terrible story. A hush had descended on the group. It must have been a similar traitor who had betrayed them at Chandannagar. Perhaps one he had himself taught during the lessons they held. Faces flashed through Ananda's memory. Makhon had died because of one of them.

'Master-da had been caught eventually on 8 October, 1926. Surely the Mir Jafar⁴ who had betrayed him will be garlanded several times as a great revolutionary in the years to come. He and I were together for sometime in the Medinipur jail before he was sent out to the jails on the western coast of India.'

Ganesh-da had picked up the tale. 'When he was brought back, we were released simultaneously but not placed under house arrest, whereas Ambika-da, Nirmal-da and Ananta, who had been released nearly one-and-a-half years earlier, had been interned in different villages. The police played these little games to sow seeds of doubt.'

'My play-acting had secured my early release,' Ananta-da said. 'From Jessore Jail I was sent to Aamdanga village in 24 Parganas for a year. It was my house arrest period. Two rooms were given to me near the government jail: one to sleep in and one to cook in. The so-called kitchen could hardly qualify as a room: six feet by six feet and five feet high. I had to crawl in. The bedroom had a bed, a table and a chair but a door made of bamboo and straw. I had to remain indoors at night and report to the thana twice a day. I cultivated a friendship with the officer-in-charge and the others in the jail. Their job was to catch criminals and dacoits and they did not pay a swadeshi much importance. Besides, generous gifts – a big fish, sometimes a vegetable or a goat – ensured their cooperation. Often I was allowed privileges without the necessary higher-up's permission. With my stipend and the allowance that came from home, I had more than fifty rupees in hand every month. Those days the Zila Board doctor's salary was forty-five rupees, so you see I was well off by comparison and could afford to be generous. Rice was three to four rupees a mon, two paisas⁵ bought a seer of brinjals, four annas twenty eggs, four or five paisa for a seer of milk ... everything right down to clothes and shoes were comparably cheap. Ma, Dada and Boudi took government permission to visit me and came and lived in a Dak bungalow nearby. Baba also came and spent time with me. Needless to say, they

were very good and generous with the police officials. I was permitted to move around within a two-mile radius but I took the liberty and wandered beyond. The villagers were an extremely poor lot: the Keora, Moochi, Kaibattya castes and a few Muslim families. They were only too grateful for the gifts I showered on them and soon became good friends. I helped them regularly with gifts of money. The first thing to do was to get to know the youth. With the help of the postmaster I started a school, a kirtan group, then a gymnasium and a football club. Finally, a group of volunteers were organized to protect the village. The government officials of course knew nothing of this. The daroga turned a blind eye while his young assistant sub-inspector, who was known to the village as jamadar babu, exercised along with us.

‘Then, before I was declared completely free, I was confined to my own home for a couple of months – a nazar-bandi. I could not venture out of the municipal area and had to present myself twice at the Kotwali Thana. It was then that I heard that Master-da had been released temporarily because his wife was dying. He was jailed again after the sraddha ceremony was over.’

The officer commanding the guard had arrived to check the locks. He took charge of the keys before retiring to his cabin. Silence was to be strictly maintained through the night.

‘So that any sounds of sawing and filing can be clearly heard,’ whispered Loka-da.

It had been hoi-hoi-roi-roi all the way just as Ananta-da had promised. Singing sessions followed interspersed by discussions on stories that could be dramatized.

‘Ananta-da,’ begged some of the boys over a dinner of rice and pumpkin curry, ‘tell us of the time you planned to kill Sir Charles Tegart.’ It was always rice and pumpkin curry for dinner but a welcome change from the mixed grain satoo and the cheerey and sugar that made up the rest of the meals.

Ananta-da made a show of considering their request and then shook his head, toying with them. But Ananta could see the cogwheels of his mind clicking into position, planning the twists and the turns that could be used to juice the story to its fullest. Finally, he cleared his throat and was ready. ‘Now this was in the intervening months between my stealing those Rs 3,000/- from my Baba and my

return to Chattogram for the AB Railway Dacoity. I had moved into the Taltola shelter, in Kolkata, and was living with Khoka and Gopi. It was there that we came up with our plan. Sir Charles Tegart had returned to India after a period of six years to take up the post of police commissioner. He had been responsible for breaking up the campaign planned by Joteen Mookerjee. Many groups had begun plotting his death along with those of Rai Bahadur S.C. Majumdar and B.N. Chatterji. Persons were deputed to watch their movements and word was brought back that Tegart was vastly amused.

‘It had been Jyotish-da who had inspired Gopi to remove the tyrant Tegart from this world. Gopi had begun to believe that it was the reason for which he had come into the world ... to rid India of Tegart. He had been watching Tegart for days: he watched him from a big house close to Tegart’s bungalow and from another that afforded a clear view of Lalbazar. Months on end Gopi kept up his vigil. When Tegart drove, Gopi followed behind in a coach; when Tegart walked, Gopi walked. In those days it was impossible for a Bengali youth to get too close to Tegart, and besides, Nityananda the witness had given an accurate description of Gopi to the police which included the 1 ½ inch long scar on his right cheek. It meant Gopi could not get too close and the danger was that he could mistake someone else for Tegart.’

‘Once suited and booted, all Europeans look alike,’ observed Ganesh-da. It set off hoots of laughter.

‘While we were riddled with doubts, Gopi was getting more and more desperate. He was also getting irritated with us. He? Make a mistake in recognizing Tegart?’ Ananta-da continued. ‘Our plan looked something like this:

‘Winter morning. Tegart comes out of his bungalow and goes for a walk with his little dog to Chowringhee.

‘The attack would take place somewhere along this route either while he was on his way out or on the way back.

‘Gopi would carry a pistol in one hand and a revolver in the other. He would shoot him and continue to pump in bullets until he was certain that Tegart was dead.

‘If Gopi failed and Tegart attempted to run via Chowringhee then Khoka would get him. He would be waiting fifty to seventy yards away from Gopi.

‘If Tegart ran eastwards on to Free School Street, I would shoot him.⁶ I would be waiting seventy yards away from Gopi.

‘Khoka would be dressed in a European costume. He would carry a revolver and a large time bomb which, when ignited by lotion, would explode in seven seconds.

‘I would be dressed as a Bengali and would be carrying a revolver and a similar time bomb.

‘Gopi would dress like a Muslim with a fez on his head, and a woollen scarf obscuring his face and the scar.

‘If Gopi was successful, we would not reveal ourselves.

‘Armed with a Mauser pistol, Julu-da, riding his cycle, would keep in touch with all of us and provide assistance wherever it was required.

‘I was at the appointed place that day, certain that Gopi and Khoka had also taken up position. I stood smoking a cigarette. Swadeshis do not smoke and it makes an effective disguise. I would not be recognized by the guards who patrolled Kyd Street. Gopi was within my line of vision but Khoka was not. I was counting the minutes and straining my ears for the report of Gopi’s revolver and its echo. Instead, all I heard was the sound of an approaching cycle. Julu-da sped past crying out: “Go back; go back; Khoka has had an accident; his clothes have caught fire.” I knew at once what had happened. The bottle of lotion in his pocket had leaked. Carbon di sulphuride evaporates rapidly leaving the yellow phosphorous to self-ignite. In fact, that was exactly what had happened. The bomb ... the bomb that snuggled in his pocket! My heart jumped right into my mouth.

‘We got to hear the whole version back at the Taltola house. Julu-da had by then administered the necessary first aid and Khoka’s clothes were soaking in a bucket of water but they continued to issue smoke. The people on Chowringhee Road had called out: “Sahib, sahib! Aag. Aag lagaa!” “Oh, my cigarette!” Khoka

had exclaimed as he opened a fire hydrant on the street, quickly taking care to douse the bomb first. The treacherous yellow phosphorous ceases to combust only when submerged. The flames would reappear every time he moved away from the flowing water. Fortunately, Khoka had displayed great presence of mind else it would have been a disaster. Gopi was sitting, holding his head between his palms. I screamed at Khoka. Careless. You are always careless. Why did you not use your handkerchief and cigarette case to prop up the bottle? Because of you the entire plan has fallen apart. You are the main reason. What explanation can you give us now?’

Smiles flitted across Ganesh-da and Lokenath-da’s faces. Ananta-da tried to shield his eyes and turned deliberately away from them. ‘A burning smell caught my attention. My bhagya debota was smiling mischievously at me: the cloth of my revolver cartridge bag was on fire. My bottle of lotion had neither opened nor spilled. But the cork had soaked some of it and it had ignited the moment it had come in contact with air. That little flame was enough to set the entire cloth bag on fire. I learnt that day that we had no absolute control over the things we did but it was important for us to become technologically sound. How many revolutionaries, over the years, have been frustrated in this manner?’

The morning exercise was over but they had remained on deck. The sea stirred gently in the pale dawn light and in the distance lay a chocolate brown smudge of land huddled in mist. The change in their circumstances had seeped in gradually, for not once during the voyage had the prisoners been relieved of their chains. Ananda stood by the deck rails straining his eyes to discover the shape of the hills and the curving white beaches.

‘You wanted to know about Master-da’s wife.’ Ananta-da spoke softly, gazing into the distance. ‘I had never given her a thought, not when I saw her standing among the crowd, nor when Master-da discussed her letters with Ambika-da in jail. His students Dalil Rehman and Sukumar Biswas had brought the first of her letters. At first, Master-da had been surprised by their eloquence. She pleaded to be permitted to serve the country and work by his side. Master-da thought it was a trick, for she could not possibly have written and written so well! Finally, his spies ascertained that it was indeed her writing and that there was no conspiracy. It was the start of a relationship of sorts for they began to communicate through these letters. Nor did I spare a thought when the boys brought news of harassment at the hands of the police, the villagers and the people she called family; that Boudi was pleading for a capsule of cyanide, for she could take it no

longer. Master-da was allowed to go home for a month when she became very ill. I heard the news and became desperate to meet him. But I was a nazar-bandi in my own home. I sent word to Ardhendu Dutt. Master-da's village was nearly fifteen to twenty miles away from the city. We had to cross the river by boat and then take the narrow lane. We left after midnight. I was meeting him after several years and that too under such circumstances ... Boudi had just passed away. I am ashamed to tell you how shallow I was in those days. It makes me cringe even now. I greeted him jubilantly, congratulating him for he was now free to devote himself to the motherland. Good news. What good news! I had cried. I remember those moments as if they took place only yesterday. He looked as if he had been struck. Then he recovered ... I realize he understood that I meant no harm and was just being foolish. What did I know of the bonds that tie a man to his wife?

The sun shifted and in an instant the surface of the sea turned to that miraculous blue of a kingfisher's wings. The eastern edge of the sky caught fire and the island came suddenly alive, all silver and green, iridescent in its plumage of coconut groves. The shallow bays were a butterfly blue. The throbbing of the engines threw up the wake dashing the water against the rocks where they crumpled and hissed angrily. Boats, rowed by ex-convicts, bobbed up and down. The subdivisional officer of Ross Island waited to come on board.

A whip cracked in the air as the officer called for attention. 'We tame the Bengal tiger here.'

TWENTY

KALPANA DUTT

‘Our Mahatma-ji is to begin a fast unto death. Kalpana’s father was sitting in her room reading his newspaper. The tea had been brought in and as Kalpana filled the cups, he read out aloud:

GANDHI’S THREAT

“Fast Unto Death”

PROTEST AGAINST SETTLEMENT OF

COMMUNAL QUESTION

LONDON, Monday.

A threat by Mr Gandhi to “fast unto death” as a protest against the Government’s communal settlement is made. In correspondence released for publication today, a feature of the Government’s proposals, which has led Mr Gandhi to adopt this course, is the special electoral treatment provided for depressed classes, who, although within the Hindu system, are still untouchable for all other Hindus. They cast pollution by touch and defile food and water.

The Government’s decision sought to place the depressed classes in a position to speak for themselves through a certain number of members of their own choosing in the legislature, in seven out of nine provinces. But in order to

preserve the unity of the Hindu society, the decision did not deprive them of their vote in the general Hindu constituencies. Mr Gandhi, in a letter to the Prime Minister (Mr McDonald), written on August 18, said: "I have to resist your decision with my life. The only way I can do so is by declaring a perpetual fast unto death from food of any kind save water.

This fast will cease, if, during its progress, the British Government, of its own motion, or under the pressure of public opinion, revise their decision and withdraw their scheme. The proposed fast will come into operation in the ordinary course at noon on September 20."

Mr McDonald replied that it was not the intention of the Government permanently to segregate the depressed classes, but, besides giving them a vote with the Hindu community, to ensure their proportionate representation in the legislatures. Replying on September 9, Mr Gandhi declared: "Without arguing, I affirm that, for me, this matter is one of pure religion. The mere fact of the depressed classes having a double vote does not protect them or Hindu society in general from being disrupted. What I am against is their statutory separation, even in a limited form, from the Hindu fold. I have, therefore, been compelled reluctantly to the decision already conveyed to you."¹

'So Prime Minister McDonald feels the depressed classes should have two votes?' Kalpana observed politely, blowing on her tea to cool it down.

'Apparently so. I tend to agree with the Mahatma that they should be integrated with the other classes by means of education. The upper-caste Hindus must be taught to open their hearts and their homes to the downtrodden. It is the caste system that must be removed and not reinforced by increasing the divide.'

Father and daughter chatted pleasantly discussing the future of the country and how it should be run.

'Tidy your hair,' he said as he left. 'The DIB inspector will be here any moment on his rounds.'

There it was. The signal – the singing, just outside her window. Kalpana had lain awake for months waiting for this moment. In a trice she was up on the ledge, her little bundle of clothes slung over her back. She went to bed these days dressed in a half shirt, her sari pleated into a dhuti and her hair tightly caught up in topknot. The youth reached out to take the bundle and helped her down. She knew him well, for he had come before. But making personal enquiries were frowned upon and he had never volunteered his name.

Priti was waiting on the moonlit beach. Kalpana ran towards her and the girls flung their arms about each other. ‘I found out ...,’ Kalpana gushed. ‘They are okay ... in your home I mean.’

She looked over Priti’s shoulder, her eyes drinking in Phutu-da’s lean form.

‘Come,’ he said. ‘The targets have been set up. Let’s go over the ground rules first:

‘Treat all weapons as loaded weapons.

‘Fingers are kept away from the trigger unless the weapon is pointing at the target.

‘When loading the revolver aim it at the ground.

‘Push the cylinder of the revolver out, place the bullets one by one and then push it back until you hear a click.’

Shy little Premlata was there ready to practise as was the vivacious Kobi. The girls took turns at firing. It was too lovely a night and Kalpana’s heart sang for joy.

Practice over, the weapons and the targets were cleared away. The girls sat along the water’s edge laughing as the spray blew on to their faces. Kobi began to hum a tune, one that Kalpana knew. As she began to sing, Kalpana and Priti joined in. Their voices lifted in pure joyful notes that winged their way gracefully through the feathered leaves of the coconut palms, into the darkness stretching over the rolling waves. Not one conceivable situation had slipped past Gurudev Rabindranath. He had a song for every mood, every emotion that the young at

heart and the elderly may have occasion to experience. The youth that escorted her joined in and soon Phutu-da's soft voice had merged with theirs. The world stood still. The moment was fragile perfection. It hovered gently. It could slip at any moment and shatter. She held herself still, feeling the air as it rushed in a cooling stream across the surface of her tongue. The colour of the sky changed to an inky blue setting the world back in motion.

Phutu-da, who had slipped away unnoticed to talk to some boys, was sprinting back towards her. 'Rama, you have to leave now. Go home quick.'

'But why? We are going into action tomorrow ... besides, I have left home for good.'

'There have been developments. There will be some delay and you will be missed. There is a restraint order on you. You need to go back.'

'Yes, you should go,' Priti added.

'But they will catch me ...' she began plaintively.

'Stop being childish,' scolded Priti.

The words stung. Kalpana turned on her heel. Who was she to play big sister? Who was she to edge Kalpana out and keep the limelight for herself? Eyes blinded with tears, she stormed ahead followed by her escort. They want me out of the way, she fumed to herself; they know full well that the police would have already been notified that I have left home.

The house was visible from a distance. Policemen milled around on the verandah. 'Run,' she whispered to her companion.

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A dark-skinned, middle-aged widow in white came scampering up the corridor that led into the female ward as Kalpana was being led in.

She had managed to give the police the slip all day by slipping into Kalarpol martyr Rajat Sen's home and Binodini Mashima had kept her hidden till late in the evening. But as she tried to make her way through Pahartali back to Kattali village, she had been caught. A couple of overzealous taxi drivers had figured she was a woman masquerading as a man. The evening of 17 September, the one she had hoped would be the finest in her life, would now be spent cooling her heels in jail.

The woman sidled up beside her. 'Swadeshi? Swadeshi?' Her voice was a high-pitched cackle. 'The wicked men will come politely.' The ghomta had fallen away from the head revealing a face disfigured by lumps and tumours. 'And sit close to you.' She stressed on the word close making it sound as sinister as possible.

Kalpana shrank back in alarm. The female warder raised her arm, pretending to strike at the widow. She darted away and called again. 'They will draw the words ... with threats?' She held out her cupped hands. 'And in the end?' she blew into the shrivelled hands allowing them to fall apart. 'It is your life they will take.'

The jamadarni was locking up. 'Tsk ...' she clicked her tongue. 'Her mind has gone.'

The widow had started squabbling with some of the other inmates. There was something oddly familiar about the tumours. Yes! Priti had described them. This was Savitri Mashima – Savitri Chakraborty of Dhalghat. Kalpana had heard that her little son, Ram Krishna, had been arrested and that the daughter, influenced by her in-laws, had turned Crown witness.²

Her thoughts returned to her own unfortunate circumstances. Priti. Priti, her best friend, had let her down. She and her patronizing ways! Had she put in a word, Phutu-da would never have sent her back.

PREMLATA

Premlata walked down the stretch of beach a couple of steps behind Shanti. He had just returned with the news that Rama³ had been arrested. Now he was taking her back home. The plans have been indefinitely postponed, Kali had said briefly not seeing the eyes turn dark with emotion that veiled the underlying surge of anger. The words had struck at her cruelly. She was being sent away. There was no one that understood her grief at home and there was no one here either. When will I see you again, she had wanted to ask.

The sands stretched for miles before them, the wet edge silky and cool beneath her feet. But her heart was in turmoil. How could it be that no one wanted her? ‘Shanti Bhai!’ she said suddenly. ‘I am a revolutionary – everybody can die, everybody is capable of facing trouble ... why will I not be able to do it? Why am I being sent back? No, no, I am not going back. Why should I go? What is waiting for me at home except for humiliation? This is most unfair. I want to go back and tell Master-da that I want the same opportunity as the rest. Shanti Bhai, believe me ... I am not afraid.’

He stared at her, lost for words. Then he cajoled and placated. But Premlata pressed her hands against her ears and sat down.

‘I am not going home. I have to speak to Master-da.’

‘I will come myself and take you when it is time,’ he said.

Premlata turned and begun to run. Shanti overtook her, his hands flashing as he tried to block her path. But she was nimble, fast and fluid. Word was sent to Master-da. He was impressed but nevertheless the presence of a woman in a shelter was bound to attract attention. He asked Kali to take charge.

Kali left her at the doorstep before dawn. He did not want to go in or meet his parents. ‘I will be back,’ he said.

‘Wait,’ Premlata looked up at him memorizing the details of his face. Deep within her heart, she knew. Her tears came no more, for she had exhausted them all. She dropped to her knees and laid her head at his feet.

MAHENDRA CHOUDHURY

Tarini majhi was waiting in his sampan at Koyepara's kheyaghat. Muscles rippled beneath his polished ebony skin. Riding the ebb and swell in these waters was child's play to him.

Mahendra and Sushil De followed Kali Kinkar and Shanti. Tarini spotted the youths in their torn vests and lungis making their way leisurely towards the ghat.

'And could you not have taken longer?' he roared. Mahendra gave him a knowing look as the youths huddled into the little seagoing vessel. Today Tarini majhi was on a special assignment. Today he would guide his sampan against the swell.

The sampan came to rest off the Kattali beach. The youths made their way into the shadows. Tarini would wait. He was to assume charge of two very important people.

PRITILATA WADDADAR, SATURDAY, 24 SEPTEMBER 1932

Master-da's eyes did not waver. They were fixed on the path outside that disappeared into the gloom. 'Your teammates are here,' he announced.

'Why do you ask me to lead? I am prepared to work on the front line but why give me, a woman, such a responsibility?' She had been taken to the bagaan-bari the night before, where, in the seclusion of the leafy garden by the banks of the Karnaphuli, a powerful light and a camera had been set up. One by one each of the team members had had their photographs taken.

'Today, Bengali homes have no shortage of brave youths. And the mothers have steeled their hearts. But the British need to know that our girls are no less.'

The team arrived. They sat in a circle around Master-da and Phutu-da. 'It is an important day today,' said Master-da. 'Hands will be attending, which means a lot of important people will be there.' He pulled out the plan. 'Bireswar, Gamma and Pannalal, you will be outside the billiards room. The main hall will

be under Priti's charge. Assisting her will be Kali and Shanti. And the doors and windows in front ... they will be covered by Sushil and Mahendra. You all have your firearms and bombs? And you are all carrying your individual statements in your pockets?'

The young men touched Master-da's feet. Pritilata bent low to take the dust off his feet. 'Bless me,' she said. 'May I make your dream come true.' His eyes were unreadable, but she returned his gaze, unflinching. At last he nodded, a movement so slight as to be imperceptible.

As she led her little group through the shadows, Master-da and Phutu-da made their way to where Tarini majhi waited. He would take them back to the shelter in Bot-tali.

A sergeant, a havaldar and four sipahis waited by the gate. Horse-drawn carriages were parked along the driveway that swept up to the colonnaded portico. Coachmen tied their animals, hitched up their lungis and perched on the edge of the lawns, smoking beedis, watching the white people cavorting within. It was a big party with some forty people attending. A whist drive was in progress and there was music and dancing.

Pritilata waited with her group by the rear exit. Jayadrath's signal had been spotted. In her mind's eye she saw two young coachmen, apparently unable to contain their curiosity, moving up on to the front verandah as if for a better view. They would have no more than a minute before they were noticed. They would be holding the bombs in their hands right now. A tremendous noise and the hall filled up with smoke. 'Fire!' she called.

Screams were emanating from within and without. The coachmen ran in panic. 'It is Surjya Sen's group.'

There was nobody by the gates. The police on guard duty had run off to inform the headquarters. The team began to slip out.

An unnatural quiet was welling up, a silence that seemed to ride the crest of a tidal wave galloping towards the shore.

ANGUS KENNEDY

Angus's men were spreading out to sanitize the club surroundings. It had taken them about fifteen to twenty minutes to get there. The place was an awful mess crowded with hysterical Europeans and Anglo-Indians, mostly railway people, frightened out of their wits. '... playing cards,' someone panted, 'when they chucked the bombs in, and then the firing started.'

An elderly woman, a Mrs Sullivan, lay dead. Police Inspector McDonald was wounded but was still actively shouting instructions trying to calm everybody. His wife lay very still. Shock, thought Angus. Hicks had arrived only a few minutes before and was still taking stock of the situation. Sergeant Willis and six others lay grievously injured. A body had been found about a hundred yards from the Institute.

'It's that woman.' The body was dressed in men's clothes – a pugree on the head, a pleated dhuti and a red badge on the shirt.

'Pritilata Waddadar!' Angus exclaimed. The Gurkha sipahis crowded around. It was that red-hot terrorist they had been looking for, the one whose photograph was found in Dhalghat where Cameron had been killed.

'She was said to have been Nirmal's lover,'⁴ said Hicks salaciously. 'Been missing from home since early July!' He turned the body. A streak of blood from a superficial wound stained the front of the shirt.

Angus shook his head. 'Poison!' he said. 'The injury is not deep enough to kill.' So it was you, Pritilata, he said silently. You were in command of the raid. Managed to score a scoop, have you? The press will lap this one up! And they will insert a whole lot of details which will subsequently be discovered to be wholly unfounded. The American public is accused of hankering after sensation but I fear that the British are nearly as bad!⁵

Angus shared Malcolm's disgust for American press ethics – contemptible and irresponsible was how he had termed it. Americanization of the press was taking place the world over. Even Reuters was giving in to sensation mongering, forcing several older Reuter correspondents in different parts of the world, Malcolm included, to complain and even turn in their papers.

'Suicide! ... probably found she could not keep up with the others bolting!'

Hicks was emptying out the contents of her pockets: there were several revolutionary leaflets; a ground plan and an operational plan of the Institute; some rounds of .450 bore ammunition, a picture of Lord Krishna, a photograph of Ram Krishna Biswas – the Chandpur murderer; a whistle. He began to read one of the leaflets out aloud: The Indian Republican Army, Chittagong Branch, hereby declares today the lives of all Englishmen and white-skinned Anglo-Indians, who are prejudicial to the interests of Indian freedom, are forfeited to it. It also entreates all members of the Indian Republican Army and the people of Chittagong to begin a vigorous campaign of murdering these people wherever found to avenge the murders of their forefathers and thus relieve the country of the pernicious exploitation which they are doing to this land of OURS.

Pamphlets like these were common but this one had taken on a decidedly bloodthirsty tone. There appeared to be a distinct shift from the attitude held earlier.

A second leaflet referred to the incidents in Chittagong and Hijli: In view of the fact that all these tragedies and the ever-continuing succession of one by one of the most savage ordinances are being incited and even exalted at by Europeans in India, the IRA which has so long aimed at the official chamber alone, declares henceforward a general expedition against the European community.

It was no longer the portrayal of a disciplined army honourably limited to taking on another army. They were, for the first time, taking on the entire white population, whom they now saw as part of the enemy that was active in wreaking vengeance on the common Bengali in order to drive home the might of the white power.

‘It’s a problem,’ sighed Angus. ‘It’s impossible to put guards on every bungalow, and these terrorists may try again somewhere else. Thank the Lord my family is at home.’

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Dinesh Chakraborty, who had been hiding in the bushes, heard the bombs go off.

Jumping on to his bicycle, he pedalled furiously through Patharghata. Shanti Sen, Payaj Kanti Choudhury and Naren Das were given the nod and a night of feverish activity began. The night patrols had to be dodged, for the curfew did not permit Hindu bhadralok youths to be out on the streets after sundown, far less in the vicinity of the European and the Anglo-Indian quarters, or the use of bicycles. But by dawn the town had been littered with leaflets. They had been pasted liberally on the walls of Chittagong College and every school. And since then, the streets had seethed with inquisitive masses.

Among the leaflets was one admonishing all teachers of English high schools: You have practically forgotten your duties as teachers who have been the real nation makers in all countries in all ages and under the instigation of the alien government or in some cases of your initiative have been preventing the students from culturing love for our country. Is it not strange that you have so soon forgotten the humiliating and frightful happenings of the Terrible Monday, 31 August 1931? Can't you refresh your memory about the unprecedented brutality displayed by the armed police and the military on all the innocent students?

But it was the copies of Pritilata's statement that were drawing people by the scores. She had become the first woman martyr since the Rani of Jhansi.

... We are fighting freedom's battle. Today's action is one of the items of that continued fight. British people have snatched away our independence, have bled India white and have played havoc with the lives of Indians both male and female ...

... I think I owe an explanation to my countrymen. Unfortunately, there are still many among my countrymen who may be shocked to learn how a woman brought up in the best tradition of Indian womanhood has taken up such a horrible deed as to massacre human lives. I wonder why there should be any distinction between male and female. Instances are not rare that the Rajput ladies of hallowed memories fought bravely in the battlefield and did not hesitate to kill their country's enemies ...

... I saw the tears of mothers mourning the loss of their beloved sons who sacrificed their lives on the altar of freedom.

With all these, a new impetus came to me when I was asked by one of my

brothers to visit Ram Krishna-da in the Alipore Central Jail where in a solitary cell he was awaiting the extreme penalty meted out to him by the British law for loving his country. I passed for a cousin of Ram Krishna-da and managed to see him everyday – this smart, jolly young hero. I had about forty interviews with him before his execution. His dignified look, free conversation, calm surrender to death, sincere devotion to God, childlike simplicity, loving heart ... impressed me very deeply and made me ten times more forward than what I had been ...

After my BA examination in 1932, I hurried home with a strong determination to interview Master-da anyhow. In a few days my long-cherished desire was fulfilled and I soon stood before Master-da and Nirmal-da ...

In my short interviews with Nirmal-da I recognized his noble and beautiful heart in which staunch revolutionary principles and strong religious temperament were so nicely combined. I am fortunate that I got an opportunity to come in touch with such a great soul that silently passed away from the world without giving the countrymen any opportunity to know how great, how pure, how uncommon it was.

Nirmal-da's tragic end gave me a severe shock and I became more desperate. The result of my BA examination was out by this time and I passed with distinction. A few days later I plunged myself heart and soul into the revolution and left my beloved family for good.

Firm faith in my Almighty Father and cordial devotion to Him have been my most valuable treasure since childhood. I have carefully cherished this treasure in my bosom throughout my whole life and today I have come finally prepared to embrace His feet ...

With an invocation to Him, I launch to discharge my day's responsibility and pray to Him to purge me clean so that I may be a worthy offering.

TWENTY-ONE

KALPANA DUTT

‘God, we saved you in the nick of time.’ It was rather early in the day for the DIB inspector to pay a visit. Kalpana stood before him in the jail office. The man simpered, his eyes tearing over. ‘It is my great good fortune,’ he said placing his hand on her head, ‘to have saved a girl like you.’

What was he going on about? The chatter and the drama had begun to get on her nerves.

‘Now we know where you were going dressed in a man’s clothes. Priti was dressed in the exact same style. Thank God, we arrested you or you would have gone the same way.’

He held out a newspaper:

INDIAN TERRORISM,

SOCIAL GATHERING BOMBED

European Woman Killed.

Police Officers Wounded.

CALCUTTA, Sept. 25.

A party of terrorists armed with stolen police muskets, revolvers, sporting guns

and bombs raided the Assam Bengal Railway Institute at Pahartali Chittagong at 11 o' clock last night when a social gathering was in progress. The raiders threw bombs inside the institute killing an aged European woman and wounding Police Inspector McDonald, Sergeant Willis and six other Europeans. The raiders, with one exception, escaped.

Ten revolutionaries took part in the outrage, which is believed to have been the sequel to recent terrorist pamphlets threatening the lives of Europeans, Anglo Indians and loyal Indians which had been widely distributed in Calcutta and Chittagong.

The body of Waddadar, a Bengali girl, who had apparently been struck by bullets fired by police at the terrorists, was found near the scene. She was formerly a student at a Calcutta college and was known to the police as the leader of the Bengal women revolutionaries and an associate of terrorists who took part in the attack. These are believed to include the persons concerned in the raid on the Chittagong armoury two years ago. Her photograph was found on the body of Nirmal Sen, who was killed in an encounter at Dhalghat recently when Captain Cameron, of the Gurkhas, was murdered by terrorists. A large reward had been offered for her arrest.

Lightning raids made by the police yesterday resulted in a number of youths being arrested and quantities of revolutionary literature were seized. There was no trace of the perpetrators of the outrage.

The governor of Bengal (Sir John Anderson) expresses the intense public feeling regarding the incident in a message to the victims, in which he denounces the "senseless and brutal crime resulting in the killing of defenceless women."

The general opinion is that the outrage has revealed the inadequacy of measures to crush terrorism and, it is possible when additional troops have been quartered shortly, that martial law will be declared.

A continuous search by the police for many months has failed to result in the capture of Surjaya (sic) Sen, leader of the Chittagong terrorists for whom a reward of £750 is offered.¹

So they had gone into action without waiting for her! For seven days Kalpana

had been brooding over her bad luck and cursing Priti for having let her down. Now she would never forgive her! But her eyes kept returning to the lines: The body of Waddadar ... it was impossible. And now she was dead? Grief alternating with anger made the lines on the page blur. The inspector would just not stop talking. Kalpana turned to the jamadarni. 'Take me back please.'

ANGUS KENNEDY

CHITTAGONG OUTRAGE.

EUROPEANS ROUSED.

Warning to Indians.

Whites May "See Red."

CALCUTTA, Sept. 27.

Great indignation has been aroused among Europeans and Anglo Indians by the outrage at Chittagong on Saturday² night, when the Railway Institute Hall was bombed by terrorists, while a whist drive was in progress, a European woman being killed and 13 Europeans injured. The leader of the Indian Legislative Assembly (Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar) declared that such acts would engender race hatred, and might possibly lead to reprisals by Europeans.

Mr G. Morgan, leader of the European group, has issued a warning of the danger that his community, infuriated by a succession of anarchist crimes, might begin to 'see red'.

The Bengali girl Waddadar whose body was found near by, had committed suicide by poisoning. She was dressed in male clothes and was said to be a leading terrorist. She was the daughter of the head clerk of the Chittagong

municipality, and at one time was head mistress of a local girl's school. The raiders were disguised as Moslems, in order to evade suspicion.

Two live bombs were later discovered in the institute premises, which were much damaged by bombs and bullets. Pamphlets were found headed "Indian Revolutionary Army", and calling upon youths to join the terrorists to kill Europeans and white skinned Anglo Indians, and offering a reward for the bodies of victims brought to the terrorist headquarters. Police and troops have carried out a widespread search and made arrests, but the raiders have not yet been captured.³

The Ordinance X of June 1932 had increased the special powers bestowed on the administration. It also specified that all members of the public were to assist by arresting and handing over any person found to be disobeying orders. Taxi drivers, sampan-wallahs and launch owners were forbidden to carry Hindu bhadrakalok during the curfew hours. Armed guards were provided to protect the bungalows of railway officers and the planters. Angus's men patrolled Pahartali every night while the police and the EFR assumed responsibility for the Chittagong town. Armed vehicles were on the move keeping the town under constant surveillance. Ever since May, an average of about a hundred houses were being searched every month. Villages would be cordoned off at random and the residents, men and women, subjected to physical examinations while the interiors of their homes and their belongings were scrutinized for incriminating evidence. Not the best way of looking for Surjya Sen, agreed Angus, for it not only antagonized the already hostile Hindu population but also the Muslim population, until now assumed to be loyal. And the futility of it all was getting to the army which depended on the police for leads. By the end of September, the government's desperation was becoming apparent:

COLLECTIVE FINE

BENGAL GOVERNMENT'S THREAT

To Terrorist Sympathizers

CALCUTTA. Friday.

The determination of the Government of Bengal to fight the growing menace of terrorism in the province, particularly Chittagong, is illustrated by an official statement in which a section of the inhabitants of Chittagong, known to be in sympathy with the terrorists, are warned that unless they produce before October 15, sufficient evidence of Saturday's outrage, heavy collective fine will be immediately imposed on that section. The Government is satisfied that it is impossible for the raid to have been carried out without the knowledge of many residents.⁴

District Magistrate Hands had pressed for a fine of Rs 80,000/-. Rewards and punitive measures had been taken recourse to earlier, thought Angus as he put away the newspapers. They were yet to produce results.

SIR CHARLES TEGART, 1 NOVEMBER 1932

The lights dimmed once and went on again and there was applause. Sir Charles walked to the podium and adjusted his pince-nez. He cleared his throat and made a joke about the weather. As laughter spilled out and died down, he took a final look at his notes and set them aside.

‘The first point that I would like to impress on you is that terrorism, like indeed civil disobedience, is essentially a Hindu movement and that the founders and leaders have throughout obtained their recruits by persistent and malignant representation of the policy and actions of the government.’

The Royal Empire Society, formerly the Royal Colonial Institute, had been founded in 1868. Its present objective was to promote the preservation of a permanent union between the Mother Country and all other parts of the Empire; to discuss the advancement of subjects of imperial interest; to encourage and

facilitate trade and industry of the Empire; to keep migrations within the bounds of the Empire by encouraging British people who wish to migrate to settle in the British dominions, instead of migrating to other countries. Rt Hon. Sir Stanley Jackson, GCSI, GCIE, was in the chair and Sir Charles Tegart, CSI, CIE, MVO, member of council of the Secretary of State for India, was presenting before the Royal Empire Society an account on terrorism in India.

‘The terrorist today has boldly announced his objective – the overthrow of the existing government by a policy of assassination, leading eventually to armed rebellion. The government has taken up the challenge. This is the fundamental duty of any government. As was stated in the Assembly, the challenge is to all ordered forms of government and to any ordered form of society.’

Sir Charles drew up a concise history tracing the roots of terrorism in India and especially in Bengal; its evolution along the way and its present-day status. In spite of his regret at leaving the police service, he had been able to throw himself into his new work with a gusto that earned him the nicknames of ‘Stormy Petrel’ – one who would rather blast through a wall rather than go around it, and ‘Murphy’ – a term of endearment bestowed by Sir David Petrie, after that simple Irishman who, when asked from whom his family sprang, growled in reply: Murphys don’t spring from annywan; they spring at them. In the critical times through which India was passing it was gratifying to be, if not at the helm, at any rate on the bridge whence he could watch the steering of her course through new seas. His address had brought in a crowd that packed the hall. Waiting to deliver speeches after him were: the Marquess of Zetland – governor of Bengal 1917–1922; the Earl of Lytton – governor of Bengal 1922–1927; Mr RA Butler, MP, undersecretary of state for India; Col Sir Umar Hayat Khan; the Maharajadhiraj of Burdwan; and Mr Edward Villiers, president of the European Association, India. But, for the moment Sir Charles had his audience spellbound.

Dr Sheldon was amongst the audience and he came forward with a display of bombs. He held up a serrated bomb made of cast iron with a U-shaped tube inside which held fulminate of mercury.

‘This bomb,’ said Sir Charles, ‘was actually left behind by the raiders at Chittagong. The second exhibit is the latest type of bomb made of aluminium. The third is a smaller type recovered from a terrorist who was blown up by his own bomb; this actual bomb was found on his person ...

‘Now let me tell you something of the steps taken to combat the menace. Firstly, as regards the press, I have tried to put before you the vast power for evil wielded amongst a strangely impressionable and imitative people by the terrorist press. The Press Law as it stood before 1908 proved, like the criminal law, wholly inadequate to meet the emergency which had arisen. Take for instance the Jugantar, which commenced in 1906. In one year successive printers and publishers were five times successfully prosecuted, but the imprisonment of the individuals did not check the trouble, in fact it aggravated it. Dummy printers and publishers were appointed from junior ranks, who gloried in cheap martyrdom and each prosecution advanced sales. The main difficulty was that there was no provision for forfeiture of the offending press. A preliminary measure was passed in 1908, followed two years later by the more comprehensive Press Act. It finally gave the powers to demand a deposit of security in cash which, as well as the press itself, was liable to forfeiture if the journal offended. This brought the newspapers under control. The terrorists answered by issuing leaflets and pamphlets of the most fanatical and bloodthirsty character, but the secrecy with which they had to be printed and circulated definitely limited the danger.

‘Various measures were likewise adopted to deal with the defects in the criminal law such as the provision of trials by a bench of three judges of the high court without a jury, and the formal prohibition of associations dangerous to public peace. But these only went skin-deep and when you scratch a monster like terrorism, instead of killing it your weapon acts merely as a spur. The movement grew steadily and the outrages became more frequent and more daring. During the Great War the terrorists received help from enemy sources which gave the movement material but vastly greater moral support. The machinery of the government was in danger of being paralysed. It was abundantly clear that the forces of law and order working through the ordinary channels were beaten. To their aid came, in 1915, the provisions of the Defence of India Act.

‘By the end of 1917, the conspiracies were definitely under control. The next step of the government was to appoint a committee to investigate the whole extent of the conspiracies and make proposals as to the powers required to deal with them should they be revived. A committee of four were appointed, of which two were judges, presided over by Mr Rowlatt of the King’s Bench. They were given access to all relevant documents and they examined many witnesses of whom many were police officers who had dealt with the movement. They found it necessary to provide for continuation, with certain limitations, of the powers

conferred by the Defence of India Act. These powers, they said, must be ready for use at short notice to deal with future emergencies. I feel I must say a few words here about the nature of the evidence on which the offenders are placed under restraint. There is a very natural repugnance to a procedure which deprives a man of his liberty without judicial trial. You may be sure that the Rowlatt Committee, which contained such a strong judicial element, would not have recommended such methods had there been any alternative. And they had been satisfied, having examined the police machine working from inside, that in application of such extrajudicial powers, the innocent were not confounded with the guilty. Bitter allegations have been made against this procedure both here and in India by persons who have tried to convey the impression that hundreds of inoffensive students have been locked up on the word of a common informer ... Sir Stanley Jackson, who has himself been through many of these records, will, I am sure, support my assertion that the most meticulous care is taken to see that no person other than the members of these murderous gangs is restrained and that in each case the degree of restraint is the minimum amount that is consistent with security. While the Rowlatt Bill was under consideration, wild rumours circulated in Punjab regarding it. For instance, that under it the police would have power to arrest three or four men conversing; no one would be allowed to own more than a certain amount of land or marry without the consent of the government. Such rumours were believed by the illiterate population. Mainly in opposition to this Bill and amongst these people, Gandhi launched in March 1919 his first civil disobedience campaign. The result was appalling. He had invoked forces he could neither direct nor control. Unprecedented scenes of mob violence occurred throughout Punjab and certain parts of the Bombay Presidency. The attacks were mainly anti-European and neither sex was spared; English banks were sacked and burnt; railway lines torn up and stations fired; officials were murdered and their bodies burnt on the piled-up debris ... and in at least one case, burnt alive. Order was restored in Punjab only after the application of Martial Law.

‘We have reached the post-War period when the country, weary of carnage and strife, looks for peace and goodwill. The gallant behaviour of the Indian troops in the War and India’s contribution to the allied victory was widely recognized and appreciated. Under the Royal Proclamation of 1919, all persons interned were released. Far-reaching reforms, known as the Montague–Chelmsford Reforms, were formally inaugurated by the Duke of Connaught in February 1921. These provided for the change, gradually and if possible automatically, from an autocratic system of government to a responsible system of self-

government. The reforms were followed in 1922 by the repeal of virtually all the enactments supplementing the criminal law, including the Rowlatt Bills, which had never been put into operation, and the Press Act.

‘The reforms failed to meet the demands of the extremists, and Gandhi again captured the popular imagination with his scheme of non-violent non-cooperation. Though his own ideas were non-violent, the movement led to a shocking massacre of the police at Chauri Chaura in the United Provinces.

‘The terrorist, now free from restraint, contended themselves with watching the developments and utilizing the opportunities, which the volunteer movement offered, of drawing their followers together and reconstituting their samitis with a view to future action. Mr Gandhi’s arrest in 1922 finally convinced them that the non-violence policy had failed ... The repeal of the Press Act was speedily followed by the resumption of terrorist propaganda in the extremist press, which ushered in the second terrorist campaign in Bengal. The Jugantar group was the first to strike, and in 1923, dacoities with murder restarted. This campaign differed from that of the War period. Then funds were collected by plundering and murdering wealthy citizens which antagonized public opinion. This time they directed the attacks mainly against government post offices and railway cash offices.

‘A further and more important move was made, destined to help internally in the matter of recruiting and organization and externally in the matter of public sympathy, namely, the penetration of the Congress machine in Bengal by the capture of seats on the Executive Committee. The penetration was so rapid that in 1924 the terrorists were in a position to compel the Bengal Congress to put through a resolution eulogizing one Gopi Nath Saha, a terrorist who had recently been executed for the murder of a European in Calcutta. In 1930, when the third terrorist campaign was launched, there were few districts in the province where terrorists were not represented on local Congress committees. A letter recently drafted by a terrorist claims that ninety per cent of Congress workers in Bengal are revolutionaries who believe in violence.⁵

‘The Calcutta Corporation, since it became an independent body, has been dominated by Congress. This Corporation has likewise passed a public resolution eulogizing an assassin. Here are the facts: in December 1930, Dinesh Gupta with two other armed terrorists murdered in a most brutal and cowardly manner Colonel Simpson, IG Gaols, who was working unarmed in the

secretariat building in Calcutta, after which they fired indiscriminately into the offices of other government officials, two of whom were wounded. Dinesh was captured and executed the following July. Five days later, the Corporation recorded its sense of grief at the execution of this cowardly assassin who, in the words of the resolution, which was adopted with the house standing, sacrificed his life in the pursuit of his ideal. Three days later, in the next issue of the Calcutta Municipal Gazette, there appeared on the front page a photograph of the murderer and an account of the proceedings of this meeting of the Corporation, with the text of the resolution. Sixteen days later, Mr Garlick, president of the tribunal which convicted Dinesh, was shot dead in his court by a terrorist who had on his person a slip which said: Cursed be your court, the injustice of which condemned Dinesh Gupta to death.

‘Is it any wonder, when public bodies like the Bengal Provincial Congress and the Calcutta Corporation have paid public tribute to persons convicted of such crimes, that emotional youths, who from their schooldays have had their minds poisoned, set out in their turn to slay and destroy? One of the earliest acts of Mr C.R. Das, when elected mayor of Calcutta Corporation, was to call for applications for appointments from those who had suffered in the country’s cause. The result has been that for years this civic body has provided terrorists and their relatives with jobs, largely in the capacity of teachers.

‘Throughout the province, schools and colleges are now far more deeply penetrated than during the first campaign. I do not think I am overstating the case today when I say there is scarcely an educational institution of any standing in which there is not a terrorist group under the control of the main leaders, with the result that murders are now committed by youths unknown to the police.’

Sir Charles went on to elaborate on the creation of new parties. Though generally separate and distinct, these frequently amalgamated together for action.

‘In 1930, a startling outrage,’ he said, ‘occurred at Chittagong. The attack was carried out by terrorists dressed for the most part in khaki uniforms and under a form of military discipline. After looting the armouries and wrecking the lines of communication, the groups then collected and marched off, a compact and disciplined body, to the hills and jungles which surround Chittagong. The attack signalled the opening of the third campaign, some of the results of which still appeared in the daily papers. Another recent and sinister development is the

advent of the female terrorist. The first Chittagong raid had been followed immediately by an ordinance reintroducing the powers of detention. The subsequent bill, again limited for five years, had been introduced and passed on this occasion by the Bengal Council by sixty-one votes to fifteen. It had been a healthy sign indicating that public opinion had sensed peril.

‘The position of Bengal in view of its importance has taken up so much of my time that I must be very brief in referring to the spread of the movement in upper India. Recent spectacular outrages, such as hurling of bombs in the Assembly at Delhi and the murderous attack on the governor of Punjab, will suggest the existence of such conspiracies. They were founded by Bengali terrorists and still draw their inspiration from Bengal ...

‘Groups now operating in the UP and Punjab style themselves the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, a name which has so captivated a section of the Bengal groups that they are adopting it themselves.

‘The groups in northern India are loosely knit; they have not got the deadly and persistent organization behind them which exists in Bengal. This is not due to any lack of effort on the Bengal terrorists, who have tried to build up the movement in UP and Punjab on exactly similar lines to those I have described in Bengal ...

‘In conclusion, let me revert to Bengal with a word about the police. As the ordinary law proved entirely inadequate to deal with the situation, so did the ordinary police machine. An intelligence service was therefore built up and staffed by specially selected officers. I may now say that I think the government and the public in Bengal owe much to the courage, loyalty and devotion to duty with which the Indian officers of the department have done their job. There has been much bloodshed, but the tale would have been truly appalling had not the gallant band made the unravelling of terrorist plots the great game of their lives. They and their families have been persecuted and boycotted, and boycott is a cruel weapon in India. They have been continually threatened and many of them have been murdered. I have seen three Indian heads of the department murdered, but without hesitation, another has stepped into the vacant chair. Such courage and steadfastness is a good augury for the future of India.’

The audience had been impressed by the deep-seated character of evil described by the lecturer and by the absence of partisan or recriminatory bias in his

address. A dozen of them volunteered, immediately, to contribute towards the cost of the publication of the address.

An account of the speech had been telegraphed to most Indian papers and it stirred up a hornet's nest in the extremist press. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika, used a delightful headline, EX POLICE CHIEF'S POLITICS, and said: Miss Mayo is the social-evil drain inspector, Sir Charles Tegart, Calcutta's ex-commissioner of police, showed by his speech at the Royal Empire Society that he was nothing but law-and-order drain inspector. Except for certain atrocious libels on the Calcutta Corporation and on the memories of Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Deshbandhu C.R. Das he said nothing that was deserving of notice.

The value of what Sir Charles says about the Calcutta Corporation and also about practically all the educational institutions being infected with the terrorist virus is to be judged by the irresponsibility that marks his utterances about the Deshbandhu and Lokmanya ...

The Corporation was not slow to protest and proposed a meeting to debate the speech and before that to ask for a confirmation of the actual wording. The mayor, Dr B.C. Roy, was to write officially to Sir Charles. This piece of news was printed in the Review of India, the official organ of the European Association in Calcutta and broadcast by Reuters.

'I have not heard from them,' said Sir Charles to the journalists who interviewed him. He was amused by the threat of a libel action. 'I will save them the trouble. I admit I did make the statement complained of. I can only say that it is true. I can give many instances to prove the accuracy of my statement. Despite the protests of the mayor of the Corporation, I do not intend to modify my charges.'⁶

TWENTY-TWO

MAHENDRA CHOUDHURY

‘In November, additional superintendent of police Mr Springfield arrived, taking over charge of the Intelligence Branch. With Captain Stevenson, the military intelligence officer, he has been touring the villages and reorganizing the system. And it has produced results.’ Mahendra was reporting to Master-da and Phutu-da. Binod Bihari Dutt, who was being groomed as Phutu-da’s assistant, was also present. ‘On 28 November, troops and armed police surrounded a house in Potiya village. Of the people arrested, two were discovered to be suffering from severe burns and the third turned out to be a doctor.’¹

‘Payaj Kanti Choudhury was released by the police early this morning. Since the day he had been issued a red card he was being called in daily for questioning. The detectives tailing him failed to unearth anything but were determined not to give up. Since late evening yesterday, he had had a session with MIO Captain Stevenson.’

Despite having done extremely well in the matriculation exams from J.M. Sen School, admission to Chittagong College had been denied. For not only had the grants-in-aid been reduced to half, in an attempt to eliminate undesirable boys, admissions from other districts were being controlled strictly. And the boy who had turned down Kali De’s invitation to join the revolution saying he intended to become a professor one day and needed to stay away from trouble, had been forced into accepting a clerical post at the steamer ghat. But life had changed the day he had spotted the names: Pulin Ghose and Jiten Das, in the list of those killed in the Jalalabad action. He had sought Kali out and insisted on being taken to Master-da. Payaj had taken the responsibility of distributing pamphlets through the city after every successful operation.

‘The district magistrate has been busy handing out identity cards: white – no suspicion; yellow – some suspicion; red – highly suspicious. All bhadralok

youths have to carry them at all times. A red card means being liable to be called to the local thana at any time. Disregarding it because of the curfew hours is not an option and to be out on the street, no matter how valid the reason, is to court trouble. The common man is terrified of stepping outdoors, for a kind of madness has been unleashed. Stories are circulating of how shoot-at-sight orders have claimed lives of government servants and even Anglo-Indians who had been unable to come up with the correct answers within an instant.'

Payaj had been last seen dragging himself towards his doorstep. The people on the street had stopped and stared. The eighteen-year-old's eyes had bulged and his nose and mouth dripped blood. The hue and cry had brought the family members to the door but by then Payaj was no more.

'Murder!' Phutu-da and Binod cried together.

'True,' said Master-da. 'But what can the family do? 'The middle class, they make easy victims.'

KALPANA DUTT

That Kalpana was an accomplice of Priti's, there was no doubt. And yet there was no evidence. There had been some twenty-four arrests but all in vain. It was proving impossible to move ahead with the Pahartali Club Raid Case. But the police were in no mood to let Kalpana go. Now that they had her they were anxious to nail her somehow; prove that after the armoury raid the seized arms had been concealed by her and that she had been instrumental in recruiting other girls into the party.

Her father had come to take her home. He was one amongst those who had stood surety for her.

'You will now be sent up under Section 109 – applied to those who conceal their identity for immoral purposes!' The lawyer laughed. 'It's utter nonsense! A political case under 109!'

But Kalpana's father did not laugh nor smile. 'You jump bail and I am going to

let them hack you to pieces,’ he growled at his daughter as he ushered her into the car. He would henceforth personally escort her every day to court. It was 22 November. Kalpana was returning home after nearly two months in jail. Police watchers were to keep the house surrounded night and day. It was humiliating, to say the least, for Rai Bahadur Dutt Gupta’s household. Father and daughter travelled in silence. Little did they know that a letter, smuggled into her room, lay waiting. It was from Master-da, directing her to abscond at the first opportunity: Stay ready. Your Doordeshi Dada will look for an opportunity to take you away.

Ma said little, as did Thakur-Ma, and the servants tiptoed about the house not daring to speak. They were all terribly afraid for her. But once in her room, Kalpana’s heart jumped for joy. Doordeshi Dada was the youth who escorted her regularly. ‘Doordeshi shei rakhal chheley aamar baater boter chhaayaye shaara bela kheley gelo’ ... the cowherd from that far-off land spent the afternoon playing in the shade of the banyan tree by the side of my road. Gurudev Rabindranath’s composition was his favourite song and the melody was the signal that Kalpana recognized. She read the letter a second time over before destroying it. Once women were banned, she said to herself. Then we had come to look upon ourselves as greatly fortunate on just being permitted to join. Now it is no longer a question of merely enlisting, we actually have the privilege of being near Master-da and working under his personal guidance. It is more than one can expect out of life.

On 28 December 1932, Kalpana was once again found missing. Her father, a sub-registrar in government service received orders to pay up the 1,000/- rupees bond. In a report to Commissioner AJ Dash,² District Magistrate Hands wrote: In view of the repeated warnings given to her father about her conduct since last May, I am sending up proposals for his removal from Government service.

‘Priti had insisted on suicide,’ Master-da explained. ‘She argued so eloquently ... said she had to die to show our people that women too can fight and die for their country. Though I do not believe in suicide personally, I could see she had tasted amrit.’

‘Kali went back after her,’ Phutu-da added. ‘The boys had taken cover in the long grass when they realized she had not come away with them. She said to him: “My brother, I have taken the cyanide. You go ahead. Tell Master-da I send my pronams.” She then handed him her revolver. The police had begun to arrive

and Priti was losing consciousness. Kali squeezed his own cyanide capsule on to her tongue even though he knew she was nearly dead.'

'She could have done so much more by coming back alive.' For the first time Kalpana wept openly for Priti. 'If only I were by her side.'

'Here.' Master-da and Phutu-da, who had both arrived at Kutir that day to receive her, extended their weapons. 'Choose one.'

The sight of the three revolvers stemmed the tears. She was to have her own. And one that belonged to either Master-da or Phutu-da. Which one would she keep? Army revolvers were heavy and unwieldy, especially for women. She had heard how Putu-di in Chandannagar had been driven to tears trying to squeeze the trigger. The finger had blistered over but she hadn't given up and had refused to listen to reason. Ananta-da and Ganesh-da, they had still been posing as ordinary revolutionaries, had been unable to console her and she had kept dabbing her face powder on to her finger and trying till she succeeded. Kalpana tested all three and chose the one that seemed to be the lightest.

'Bhulu.' Master-da's voice was grave. 'Think carefully once again. There is still time. Look at the way we live. Food, bath, sleep ... there is no certainty and of luxuries like mosquito nets and pillows ... you might as well forget those. The road the ferari has to travel is long, and at every bend there is a snake waiting to strike. If it is acceptable, this revolver is yours.'

'It is acceptable, Master-da. The torch that Priti ran ahead with ... I am not going to let it die out.'

After the morning meal, the men had gone upstairs to sleep. And Kalpana had, in a forlorn kind of way, trailed behind Lady Macbeth. Master-da had brought Priti here from Dhalghat. Spells of weeping came on every now and then. She would mourn forever it seemed. Lady Macbeth sat her down with a pile of hard-bound exercise books. They were filled with Master-da's writings: little essays, little articles addressed to his disciples. Kalpana wiped her nose with the end of her sari and flipped casually through the pages. Here was one entitled BIJOYA³ written on the day of Bijoya Dashami, fifteen days after Priti went into action:

So many victories packed within this tiny insignificant life of mine. But this

Bijoya has been more significant than all the others. Three victories within two-and-a-half years and I have witnessed my brothers and sisters sacrificing their lives. I take the complete responsibility upon myself.

Today, the memory is coming back: how easily they gave up the comforts of this beautiful life and for the sake of the independence of this invaluable motherland, they went laughing and leapt into the lap of death. On a day as pure as this one their memories bring tears to my eyes and make my heart burst with pride. Ashu, Naresh, Bidhu, Tegra, Tripura, Madhu, Ardhendu, Probhash, Nirmal, Jiten, Pulin, Moti, Sashank, Ram Krishna, Bhola, Nirmal Babu, Amarendra, Mona, Rajat, Debu, Swadesh, Makhon – each one comes to mind one by one and through my recollections I acknowledge them.

How many have I torn from their mother's loving breast and sacrificed at the altar of independence? How many have I sent into exile across the ocean, causing homes to be rent by wails of despair; upon how many innocents have I unleashed the terrorists of the British government ... how can I absolve myself of these?

Ma, Anondomoyee, today on the day of your immersion, I ask you, in all sincerity, was I wrong?

Fifteen years ago, after much thinking, I had set out on this path. And I have stuck to it since. Did weakness not strike on the way? It came in many forms but I kept my sights fixed on the target. Though many may think that I have got it wrong, I still believe it is the only path to take. The question that remains is: have I sinned? But the truth is that the battle for independence has wreaked far more havoc in other countries than it has done here.

Ma, help me remain strong. Do not let me stray from my path.

I was stronger earlier, but now in these last two months a tenderness has taken possession of my cruel heart. My heart aches thinking of the mothers that will weep today on this day of happiness, of fathers whose very existences have been poisoned, of brothers and sisters who will sigh deeply. The stone, that was my heart until now, has begun to melt.

Fifteen days ago I dressed that perfect and pure image myself. In one hand I placed the weapon and in the other amrit. Then I immersed it. The one whom I had dressed in the warrior's garb by my own hand and sent out to battle having

given her permission to jump to her death ... in these fifteen days I have not been able to get her out of my mind for even a single moment.

Having dressed her when I said very emotionally, 'Tokey ei shesh shajiye dilam, tor dada to tokey jiboney aar konodeen shajabey na ... This is the last time that I am helping you get dressed, this dada of yours will never enjoy the privilege again,' the image had laughed a little. How sad was that laughter. Within it was a whisper of joy, of troubles to come, of a pride that had been hurt.

She took the amrit herself and became amar but here in the mortal world we have not been able to get over the pain of losing her. On this day of Bijoya, the beat of victory resonates with my sobs. She was beautiful, pure and innocent. I am yet to find a person with more virtues, more talents. Her inner beauty had transfixed me; her mental strength, determination and courage ... she was no less when compared to the best. And this highly educated person was a simple lovely being. Her tremendous contribution gives me courage and helps me become a better person.

To my beloved divine image, this is what I have to say: Rani, I have caused you pain. Today, on the day of Bijoya forget your dada's faults. Perhaps because I had considered you a part of me I had scolded you thoughtlessly over minor issues, caused you pain. I was confident that no matter how much I scolded you, you would never be angry with me. But in that last moment, I scolded you a little again. It was my mistake. Perhaps you have gone away a little angry with me. Wherever you are today, forgive me.

Do you not remember that you could not stand it if your dada was even a little bit sad? That is why I am telling you, on this day of sanctification, cast from your mind all my faults and accept my tribute of love and of admiration.

Today is a day of coming together, of putting aside differences. If you were by my side, how happy I would have been. But grant me that happiness even if it has to be from another world.

Taking Ma's name on this beautiful day, I want to say aloud that I have never found any one as beautiful or as pure as you. You were as pristine as a flower and your indescribable donation has made you even more beautiful and great.

Why had Master-da scolded Priti and more importantly, why had he given her permission to commit suicide? The cyanide was only to be used as a last resort and had Master-da spelt out the ground rules clearly, Priti surely would not have disobeyed? Or would she? Did she, wondered Kalpana, really know this childhood friend of hers as well as she thought she did.

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‘Today we shall go to Saroatali,’ Master-da announced. ‘Feraris – absconders, from all over will be attending. You will get to meet them all.’

Until now Kalpana had strictly followed the code and had tried not to find out about the others in the group.

‘Zamindar will be there. And Talwarkar.’

These were code names. She knew that. But she would have to now match them with the faces.

The meeting began late in the evening. Some twenty-five boys were present. They had come from far-flung villages and were the contact persons for the groups they managed. Master-da had built up a solid rural base well before embarking on the armoury raid. It was this base that had provided the backup after the battle of Jalalabad and helped turn the failed rebellion into a successful uprising.

The six-foot-tall boy with the fuzzy growth on his upper lip, who had visited Priti’s house, sat in front. He nodded in recognition.

‘Who is that, Phutu-da?’ Kalpana sat cross-legged on the floor beside Tarakeshwar Dastidar, very conscious of the fact that she was the only woman present that day.

‘Oh! Him? That’s Lecturer.’

‘Lecturer? Why, he can barely talk!’

Phutu-da laughed as he told her Lecturer's story. His real name was Mani Dutt and he was in class ten of the Saroatali High School. Phutu-da, like all group leaders, had remained in touch with his village high school, keeping an eye out for promising students. Word had been brought to him that this boy was keen on meeting Master-da. A meeting was fixed and it had been Phutu-da who had come forward, pretending to be Master-da, while Master-da observed from behind a tree. But every question put to the boy had been answered with a relevant Sanskrit shloka, a verse in high-flown Bengali or a quotation drawn from English literature. He had been taken aback and couldn't for the life of him fathom as to why the boy wouldn't give a straight answer. Once the interview was over and the boy had gone, he had found Master-da in splits of laughter. The child has prepared so hard for this interview, he said. I can see he has the makings of a real lecturer.

'We had not realized how poor his family was until Master-da gave in to his pleas and spent a night in their house. There was only one room and the roof leaked. The family huddled in a corner and insisted on giving Master-da their only blanket ... it was a great honour for them, they said. Their cottage is now amongst one of the safest shelters. Unfortunately, after the Pahartali raid, Lecturer has been forced to abscond.' Phutu-da smiled a little sadly. 'That brilliant academic record ... it is of no use any more.'

Doordeshi Dada was there too. Phutu-da caught the question in her eyes. 'That is Shanti Chakraborty. Ki rey? In all this time did you not even ask him his name?' he teased shyly. 'He started out with the Anushilan Party; joined it by defying his father and rejecting his future as the village priest. Instead, he started a physical culture club. His boys,' he added wistfully, 'were fiercely devoted to him and would not join any other group. When the groups broke up after Jalalabad, Shanti received information that one lot had hidden their weapons in a pukur. He retrieved them and handed them over to his Anushilan leaders. We had been wary of him at the time but now all that is in the past.'

Master-da had begun speaking. Kalpana strained to catch his words. He was talking of the future and how the burden needed to rest on younger shoulders. Take copious notes, he was saying, write down everything you learn ... leave it behind for the generations yet to come ...

Kalpana rested her chin on her knees thinking about what was being said. Phutu-da gave lessons in the manufacture of bombs and explosives. It would be her

duty to record them meticulously. She stole a look at him ... It was the first time he had had such a long conversation with her.

Kalpana lay in bed bathed in a golden flush as sleep settled gently on her eyes. The walk back from Saroatali lingered in her mind. They had been walking through the fields following the course of a khal when Master-da had begun to hum a tune. Sing, he had commanded. Set your voice free. There is no one here.

Hey khoniker atithi

Eley prabhatey karey chahiya

Jhora shefalir poth bahiya

Hey momentary visitor

You have come at dawn, who is it that you seek?

Having walked down the path carpeted with shefali blooms.

Master-da had a pleasant voice and Kalpana, like most Bengali girls, had had daily singing lessons ever since she could remember. When Master-da had fallen silent he had nodded to her to carry on.

Atithi eshechhey dwarey

Chheelo shey nadir parey

The visitor is at the door

Having returned from the bank of the river.

Do you know ‘Orey shabdhani pothik, Barek poth bhuley moro phirey’ ...? ... O cautious traveller, turn around, he had asked. She had heard Priti sing it. But she had known another one that Priti had been fond of. It had made Master-da smile.

Orey debota aamar pashan debota

Hridi mandirey boshey aami

Tomar choroney ujaar

O my Lord, my Lord of stone

I sit within the temple inside my heart

And surrender at your feet.

The journey had ended before they had realized. They had been back at Kutir. Phutu-da had stopped her at the door to her room. ‘Hey Khoniker Atithi’⁴ is my absolute favourite, he had said, adding softly that he would love to hear it again.

‘Police. Police.’ Lady Macbeth Mashima was shaking her awake. The crunching of boots running across the gravel outside. Mashima had pulled Kalpana upright. Where was that revolver? It was right there somewhere among the bedclothes. ‘Go now,’ she hissed. The others have gone already.’

‘But I can’t find the revolver.’ Kalpana was in tears. It was somewhere in that bed.

Phutu-da burst into the room. He had run back upstairs. ‘Come, come.’ He dragged her out of the back door and down the stairs. It was about two o’clock in the night. Far in the distance, a shadow moved. It appeared to be walking away. The gait seemed to be that of Master-da’s. Without relinquishing the grip on her

hand, Phutu-da hurried towards the figure.

She had lost her revolver on the fourth day of her ferari life. Never again, she swore, would she fall asleep without the comfort of cold metal resting against her face.

TWENTY-THREE

KALPANA DUTT

Ambika-da – Ambika Charan Chakraborty, who had been in prison since October 1930, had been sent up for trial along with Saroj Kanti Guha and Hemendu Bikash Dastidar. The Supplementary Armoury Raid Case trial had begun on 2 January 1933.

‘Football matches are being held in the villages ... sports are being promoted by MIO Captain Stevenson,’ reported Mahendra.

Master-da listened quietly. ‘They are cultivating informers,’ he observed.

The meeting progressed. News from the villages was pouring in. Stevenson was offering jobs, was getting exceedingly chummy ... Raja had got his man. Kalpana guessed this was Himangshu Bhowmik who had promised to strangle the member, the one who had turned out to be a police informer. Every public spot in the city and in the villages had been pasted over and over again with posters promising steadily increasing rewards. Master-da’s picture had been blown up and was by now a more than familiar sight, smiling down from the walls of the railway station, bus stops, village shops, fashionable shops in the city, schools and colleges. One of the party boys, Rohini Barua, was being harassed by the daroga of the local thana and had eventually broken down. But instead of confessing, Rohini had killed the daroga and was now up for manslaughter. The boy, who had been distributing Pritilata’s written statement on the morning of the first day of the trial, had thrown a handful into the IB inspector’s compound and had been arrested. The thirty or so detonators on his body had led to the discovery of the explosives¹ that had been stashed away.

‘I am getting old.’ Master-da shook his head sadly. ‘It is time you boys took charge.’

There was that wistful note again. It made Kalpana wonder whether the years of

living under such strain was wearing him down. Master-da was not yet forty but he had embarked on the life of a revolutionary in his early twenties. He still laughed. But he had been known for being able to laugh easily and freely. Kalpana who loved laughter and banter had begun feeling a little stifled of late.

Several addresses had been changed since the day Kutir had been raided. The new landlady was calling out. Dinner was ready. Tonight they were guests of this Muslim widow. On leaf platters she served generous helpings of rice and dal and a curious black vegetable. As Kalpana took her first mouthful, she felt her hostess's anxious gaze. An intensely bitter taste prickled the back of her throat and it was with great effort that she brought herself to swallow the mouthful. But as Master-da and the others ate calmly through the meal, she followed their example.

‘Have I made it well?’ the old woman asked.

‘Oh! Yes, yes it is delicious,’ Kalpana lied.

‘I am so glad,’ she gushed. ‘It is the first time I have ever cooked tea. I know how you city people like it.’

Tea? Kalpana stared at her in wonder. People like her were so poor and lived so far out in the interiors that they had no idea as to what tea was. The old woman would have sent her son especially that day to a shop many miles away to buy a handful of tea leaves for the guests.²

ANGUS KENNEDY, JANUARY 1933

Angus was back in his room. The fog descended fast during the evenings and brought with it a chill that worked its way to the bone. Through his window he could see his men troop back to their tents. They were dressed for the cold: dark-brown woollen shirts and knee-length shorts of khaki drill, socks, nailed boots and puttee. But it was the Gurkha hat with the chin strap and the crossed kukri daggers that set them apart from the rest. A fire blazed in front of the mess tent. The day had been spent carrying out field-firing exercises with ball ammunition

in the presence of about 10,000 of the local malcontents by way of impressing them with the powers of the rifle and machine gun.

Prodyot Bhattacharya, the juvenile involved in the murder of District Magistrate Douglas of Midnapore, had been hanged at Midnapore Central Jail on the morning of 13 January 1933.³ His accomplice had made a clean getaway. Though a plea had been made for Prodyot, on account of his age and the fact that his revolver had jammed at the last moment, the appeal had been dismissed. After Peddie and Douglas, it was unlikely that any ICS would jump at the chance to occupy the post.

Midnapore and Chittagong! They were keeping them busy. But Chittagong was different ... it was far more organized. It was just the other day that he had caught a couple of terrorists red-handed making bombs. One of the two had been killed while trying to escape. They all had agents in the post office, who opened and read letters written by anyone who might give useful information.

The men had been reduced to silhouettes by now as they filed past the fire. He watched the routine, now rendered familiar by the years spent with the Gurkhas: the stocky figures, the show shuffle, the extension-flexion of the right arm and the jerk of the head as the rum ration was knocked back.

KALPANA DUTT

Little covered lamps sent their light shimmering through the hut. A bundle of newly harvested grain, ripe and golden, had been plaited into intricate designs and laid at the hearth. Kalpana and the boys had spent the afternoon helping the landlady decorate. Soaking a little rag into a thin paint-like solution of powdered rice and water, she used it like a brush and created skilful alpana patterns on the floor. She was now busy frying pitheys: rice dumplings stuffed with a mixture of coconut and jaggery that would then be dipped in a supersaturated syrup and kept aside until the sugar turned into crunchy, crystalline glassy bits. It was different from the delicate crepes they ate at home or the creamy little dumplings that Ma steamed in sweetened milk. Master-da had sent word to all his groups: Eat well on this harvest festival. Though they ate very simply on most days, he

drove home the point that he did not want his boys to suffer for want of food. My job is to save my cadre, not my cash.

‘We have to teach these downtrodden, meek and silent lips to speak, we have to kindle hope in these arid, tired, broken hearts. We have to call out to them and say: Unite, arise, the injustice that you are afraid of is a greater coward than you.’

Shanti-da was reciting Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore’s ‘Ebar Phirao Morey’, one of Master-da’s favourites. He had begun living with them ever since that night when he had returned bruised and scratched all over. He had been on his way to hand over weapons to feraris in another village when an army patrol had challenged him. He had submitted instantly and agreed to accompany them to the camp for questioning. But, he needed to relieve himself before they set off. The soldiers had pointed to a spot in the distance and it was then that Shanti-da had made a sudden dash. The bullets had missed their mark and he had found his way back safely.

Gurudev’s poetry made Master-da’s eyes glow with memories. They misted over easily these days. The warm scent of sugar and hot ghee wafted across from the cooking area. She sniffed at the air and her eyes danced mischievously, aware that Phutu-da watched though he pretended not to.

‘Anurup Babu, Ambika Babu, Charu Babu, Julu Babu and I had taken charge of the youngsters,’ said Master-da.

‘Who is Anurup Babu?’ Kalpana nudged Phutu-da without taking her eyes off Master-da.

‘An old revolutionary dada.’

‘Anurup Sen? The high school teacher, the one who died of cholera?’ Kalpana hissed, her dark eyes darting from Phutu-da’s face to Master-da’s. Words had to be dragged out of this one. She had figured by now that Phutu-da quite enjoyed her prattle and was determined to draw him out. Master-da shot her a look and Kalpana bit her tongue and ducked. Of late he never seemed to take his eye off the two of them.

‘Pramod Ranjan Choudhury had introduced Ananta who had in turn brought his dada Nand Lal and his classmate Afsar-ud-din. Nirmal Babu was a very young

man in those days as was Jashoda Ranjan Pal. Jashoda Babu had been a lance naik in the army. Nobin, Shoton, Narayan and Abani Bhattacharya ... they had dreams in their eyes once ...' Master-da's voice grew heavy with pain but he recovered quickly and continued with his story. 'It was sometime in 1918. A pitch-dark Amavasya night. We led the boys into a forest across the river. We set Her down on an elevated spot. We had been to Kali pujas before but this one was very different for what we offered Her was not just flowers, oil lamps and dhoop but six new pistols and revolvers; sharpened steel daggers and Gurkha bhojalis. We were to take the oath anew: we would not hesitate to use these on the enemy and would not shy away from killing.

'The midnight hour had struck. Wordlessly we took our oaths and prayed for blessings. I watched your Ananta-da ... he was no more than a little boy at the time. It was a scary moment for him. I watched as he touched Her feet and made his promise. The words? We had left it to each one; they could say whatever came to their hearts.

'Ambika Babu and Anurup Babu used a sharp dagger to cut the symbol of OM on their chests. They dipped bel leaves in their blood and placed them at Ma's feet and made their oaths. I did not follow them and I was glad to see Ananta did not either. I will never stop anyone from following what is there in their hearts but I have always disliked such displays...'

Mashima had sent word from the kitchen. The pitheys were ready.

MAHENDRA CHOUDHURY

On 10 February 1933, verdict was delivered: Ambika-da had been sentenced to death. The district and sessions judge, Mr A.deC. Williams, the president of the special tribunal, and the Hindu member Mr Nrisinha Ranjan Mukherji were convinced of his complicity and that nothing less than the extreme penalty would meet the ends of justice. The Muslim member Mr A.F.M. Rehman remained, however, unconvinced. Hemendu Dastidar had been acquitted and Saroj Kanti Guha sentenced to transportation for life. As it had happened the previous time, Ambika-da⁴ and Saroj had been removed from Chattogram before the news

broke.

The shock on Master-da's face was evident as Mahendra broke the news. Coming as it did after the amazing verdict of the Chittagong Armoury Raid Case, this was a bolt from the blue. New determination lit Master-da's eyes: Ambika Babu would have to be avenged.



KALPANA DUTT

It had been well past midnight as they made their way to a shelter in Gairala village. For the last few days they had been working round the clock; holding meetings every night, crossing brazenly into the city; moving between villages; holding training sessions by the banks of the river and the khals. It had been exhausting. Brajen – Brajendra Sen, the contact in Gairala village had arranged for them to stay at the home of Niranjan and Khirodprabha Biswas for the next four days.

The rain had soaked through the folds of her sari and seeped into her sandals. The moist stench of weeds assaulted the nostrils as they were crushed underfoot. Master-da strode along in front with Sushil Dasgupta by his side. Lecturer and Shanti-da walked beside her helping her across the tangled undergrowth in the dark of the night. Over the past few weeks Master-da's attitude had caused Phutu-da to base his work out of another village. It had been weeks since she had seen him. But there would be a meeting after a short break at Gairala.

The thought filled her with instant elation and remorse so tangible that it made her ache. She hated being so full of emotions beyond her control. Could it be Master-da, she wondered, who was feeling just a little bit jealous, could it be some faint stirring of emotion at the thought of the life he had chosen to throw away? His casual remark: Bhulu is cheerful because Phutu is expected,⁵ had surprised her by the jagged response it produced deep within.

16 February 1933: Kalipada Mukherji's execution at Dhaka the previous day had become the talk of the village. The news was in all the local papers. Mr Kamakhya Prasad Sen, the special magistrate at Munshigunj, had been shot dead on 27 June 1932, through an opening in a window as he slept in the safety of Judge Sachin Chatterji's bungalow. Thirteen youths had been arrested but Kalipada had been convicted on the basis of a telegram he had sent:
OPERATION KAMAKHYA SUCCESSFUL.

'You have visitors? You didn't tell me.' A neighbour had burst in.

Khirodprabha Mashima was taken aback.

‘My. My. And who might this pretty child be?’ The woman placed her fingers beneath Kalpana’s chin tilting it upwards.

‘Why?’ Khirodprabha Mashima rushed to the rescue. Touch her feet, her eyes flashed the command at Kalpana and the other youngsters. ‘Did I not mention that some relatives of my daughter’s in-laws were coming to visit?’

The situation seemed to have been managed, for the woman left without too many questions but she left Master-da feeling a little shaky.

‘Don’t worry,’ comforted Khirodprabha Mashima. ‘She is a friend. She will never harm me.’

That settled the matter. They were to leave that evening in any case. Phutu-da and Kali Kinkar De were to make their way from the Amiable Shelter at Habilash Dwip and wait by the side of a pukur outside Gairala. Leaving in broad daylight entailed huge risks.

But by eight o’clock that night it was certain: the house had been surrounded. The rustle of leaves, the odd low shout, the sound of heavily shod feet running in sudden bursts. That woman had betrayed them or someone she knew had. The army had been led to the house, else they wouldn’t have found it in the fast descending evening fog.

The alert sent a current through the air. ‘Put out all the lamps save one. And dim it. Gather all documents, revolvers and torches. Leave no personal possessions behind.’

At 9.15 they slipped out in a single file. Leading the way through the dark was Brajen. Master-da followed with Kalpana inching immediately behind. Shanti had positioned himself behind her with Lecturer and Sushil Dasgupta bringing up the rear. They maintained a close and reassuring proximity.

‘Kaun Hai?’

The voice startled them. They froze. It had come from the part of the bamboo grove that lay to the east of the house. Gradually uncoiling from their positions, revolvers gripped tightly in every fist, the line retreated, taking cover behind the

wall of the house. A bullet tore through the night, grazing Sushil's wristwatch as he jumped over the low perimeter wall. Master-da had gone in a fraction of a second before. A moment's conference between Master-da and Shanti-da; instructions waved in sign language and Shanti-da was herding them across the slippery banks of the pukur that lay behind the house. It was a short dash to the safety of the bamboo thicket. They were moving in a north-eastern direction for the police and the army had revealed their position in the east.

Kalpana edged along cautiously in the cold slippery mud holding on to Master-da's hand for dear life. There was a sudden shot and a burst of gunfire and before she knew it she had slid neck-deep into the icy cold water. There was someone else in the water. He came up close and whispered. 'Is it you, Master-da?'

'It's me, Kalpana.'

'Oh! Okay! Come along then. Hold on to me.'

Flares lit up the night sky and rifle bullets zipped low whining over the surface of the water. Kalpana ducked under the surface her ears ringing from the sound they made as they whipped past. Getting out of this pukur alive would be ... it was best not to think about it. Her arm was being tugged at. She raised her nose cautiously above the surface. The bank was getting steeper. Weeds reached out clinging to her legs. She was now scrambling on all fours. They crawled their way across to a clump of bamboo. There were figures, ten feet away, moving towards them.

'Lie flat.' The command was whispered into her ear. There was a deadly calm in that voice. 'You fire on one side. I will fire on the other. We have to save our ammunition.' She suddenly recognized the voice. It was Lecturer. It had been him all this while! Kalpana carried out the orders in silence. The soldiers had been stunned into inaction. It was time to make a dash to the next pukur.

'Stay underwater. Keep your nose out. Breathe out through your mouth.'

An hour went by. Lecturer pulled Kalpana gradually to the edge. 'Don't lift your head,' he whispered. 'Crawl lying flat on the ground. Freeze the moment the aalok bomb – the flare – goes up. Copy me.' He had devised a simple method. It took over an hour but they made it successfully outside the cordon. 'Please wait here. I'll go fetch Master-da.'

‘No.’ Kalpana grabbed his arm. ‘You will never make it back alive. The others must have got out by now.’

The child that had become an iron-willed man in front of her eyes relapsed.

‘I have to. If anything happens to Master-da I will not forgive myself.’

‘Master-da would not allow you to throw away your life! It’s too dangerous out there. Think of what he would have advised: live to fight another day.’ She touched her toes gingerly. There were blisters fast filling up with fluid. The sandals had disappeared somewhere along the way.

Lecturer sat hunched and miserable, unable to make up his mind. Finally he said, ‘I have a duty towards you too. You are a girl who doesn’t know the ins and outs of this village.’ He got up still sniffing and added, Kalpana thought, a trifle sulkily, ‘If I don’t take you to a safe place now all this trouble of getting you out of the danger zone would not have been worth it.’

TWENTY-FOUR

BRAJEN SEN, 16 FEBRUARY 1933

A Gurkha sipahi stepped out silently from behind a tree and wrapped himself around Brajen, wrestling him to the ground. His arms were being twisted painfully behind his back and as he collapsed under the several pairs of hands pinning him down, a shot rang through the air and a flare flooded the night with a piercing bright light.

Cries of jubilation. Master-da had been captured.

The plan to take the north-west exit and then confound the enemy by turning southwards had not worked.

They were both on the ground trussed up like poultry. In the dying light of the flare leered the faces of the hill men, fellow countrymen loyal to those that could pay a salary. It had been their comrades that had faced the revolutionaries, on behalf of the British masters, in all the encounters until now. Revenge. They were fired up. Excited.

It was a night filled with heavy army boots and rifle butts that crashed into him, bayonets that prodded and streams of urine meant to humiliate while avenging dead colleagues. Not a single white man came into sight.

A bloodied face was being lifted up. 'It's him all right.' Brajen recognized the voice of Sailendra Kumar Sengupta, the sub-inspector attached to Potiya police station.

'Kya Naam?'

Brajen's blurred vision focussed on the white face. It was close to dawn. Captain T.H. Waumsley had arrived. All the firing had died down.

‘Bijen,’ Master-da replied.

A chorus of abuses broke out. ‘That’s the bastard! It’s Surjya Sen!

At first light, the soldiers were given orders: advance very slowly, search every foot of the jungle, take cover and observe every door and every window of the houses in the locality.

Then began the three-mile trek to the camp in Potiya. He stumbled over the broken uneven ground as soldiers jerked at the ropes and prodded with rifle butts. Master-da stumbled and fell several times. He was bloodied from head to foot. The delicate frame looked as if it would take no more.

The Dak bungalow at Potiya that had doubled up as the campsite over many months now was thronged with crowds. Schools had emptied out; people had walked miles for a glimpse of the man who was their pride and joy. They stood bewildered, cursing themselves for having tempted divine providence: so great had been their pride in the fact that Master-da was invincible that they had boasted the British would never get him.

A cage had been constructed with bamboo and barbed wire. Master-da and Brajen were placed in full view of the grieving audience. Master-da fell to his feet but there was no respite. A rifle bayonet pushed its way through the wires. Brajen’s hands were still tied. He pleaded with Master-da: it wouldn’t do to collapse now. District Magistrate Hands and Police Superintendent Hicks were expected.

‘I want release now, Brajen.’ Master-da gasped. ‘I will be relieved if they hang me. But you must continue the fight. The traitors in Dhalghat were illiterate ... so I forgave them. But here ... the traitors must be sought out.’

Memories of the previous evening came cascading and with it a flood of unbridled rage: Brajen was peeping out of a window soon after the alert had sounded. A little down the road, an oil lamp could be seen swinging wildly in the dark. The yellow light briefly touched the features of the man holding the lamp. The bile rose to his throat at the memory. It was his older brother, the local zamindar – Netra Sen.

The evening train brought them to Shol-Shahar Junction where the armed police came on board.

‘So who is the great Surjya Sen?’ A British sergeant made his way through the Gurkhas. A great fist crashed against Master-da’s nose. ‘This old man?’ he sneered.

Master-da’s head rolled helplessly coming to rest in Brajen’s lap. The wet warm feeling seeping in, he knew, was Master-da’s blood. The Gurkhas pulled him upright again. Someone called for ice.

They were in the IB office lined up against the wall. They seemed to have been standing there for hours.

The officers sat around. The mood was celebratory. ‘So, Surjya Babu, you have had your fill of Priti.’ The tone was lascivious. ‘Where have you stowed Kalpana?’

Hicks strode in with Springfield. Without preamble, Springfield struck Master-da on the chest with his revolver. Once. Then again. And again. His face had flushed to a dark red and the sweat beaded over. The man had lost control. An IB officer intervened. ‘Please, sir, he is seriously injured.’

‘Then get the doctor,’ spat Hicks.

KALPANA DUTT

Within a few days Lecturer had led the way through the villages to a shelter in Uttarbhumī village, one that went by the charming name: Kalam-naach – the dancing pen. It belonged to a loyal schoolteacher.

Kali Kinkar sprang to his feet. The group discussion broke off abruptly. Kalpana and Lecturer’s arrival was greeted with exclamations of relief.

‘We were wondering how long it would take you to find us.’ Phutu-da said. ‘Master-da and Brajen’s news has spread like wildfire. But we worried that you were wounded.’

Kalpana’s eyes had locked on to Shanti-da. He sat propped against a wall ... a

sickly shade of yellow. ‘And I have had such a job of convincing this one.’ She indicated towards Lecturer. ‘Being eaten away by guilt. Keeps saying all of us came through but we could not save the one that should have been saved. Tomar ki hoyechhey, Shanti-da?’

‘A bullet got him.’ said Kali Kinkar. ‘Put his left arm out of action.’

Kalpana’s mouth fell open. Shanti-da turned red in the face as he began his tale. ‘And I thought I would kill two birds with one stone. Brajen had led Master-da off by another route. I fired the first shot and flashed my torch ... now I don’t know whether it was the right or the wrong thing to have done but I had hoped that by creating a diversion on our side it would help Master-da get away. Also it was so terribly dark. In that split second I had the ground before us figured out and was able to make a run for it.’

‘That’s when I fell into the pukur. But I thought I was holding on to Master-da’s hand,’ gasped Kalpana.

‘No, you couldn’t have. Brajen and Master-da had headed off towards the north-west hoping to cut across to the south. Sushil and I realized we were by ourselves and we dived into the khal ... it would not have taken more than a minute since that first shot but by then the bullet had sliced into my shoulder blade. The flares had lit up the night sky and I had lost Sushil by then. My left arm was becoming numb and my only thought was to get to the Amiable Shelter before I bled to death.’

‘But we had already abandoned it,’ said Kali.

Beni Choudhury and Dhiren Das, the local guides, had brought Kali and Phutuda from the Amiable Shelter at Habilash Dwip to the rendezvous spot by the pukur but when the gunfire began and the flares began to go up in the sky, they had realized that not even the Amiable Shelter would be able to provide sufficient protection. The guides had led the way to Kalam-naach and then set out to look for survivors.

‘I will live,’ said Shanti briefly, ‘and though Master-da’s capture is a huge blow, there is a calamity looming over our heads right now.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Kalpana.

‘Well,’ said Phutu-da in his quiet manner. ‘Mahendra and Sushil De have found out that eight IRA members held a meeting as soon as the news broke. They are of the opinion that I am the traitor that gave Master-da away. There is an IRA death sentence hanging round my neck.’

He pursed his lips, unwilling to voice the real truth. But, for Kalpana it was as if a cliff face had risen up towards her, jagged with menace. The roof wheeled about her and the floor seemed about to fold over. Anandomoth frowned upon association with women. It was her presence that was jeopardizing Phutu-da.

ANGUS KENNEDY

‘A thousand salaams to Captain Waumsley!’ Angus stamped on the driveway and threw one up. Waumsley returned a mock salute as Stevenson ran lightly down the steps to relieve Angus of his bottle.

The viceroy had sent his personal congratulations. A splendid piece of work, he had said and had asked that the message be passed to the officers and men of the army and Bengal police. Between the 2/8s and the 2/9s, the Gurkhas had Nirmal Sen and the capture of Surjya Sen to their credit. March 1933 had brought their tenure to a close and Angus’s battalion was busy packing up. There had been a formal farewell but the army officers had maintained a polite distance from the Chittagong ICS.

The Dak bungalow at Potiya was a straightforward Anglo-Indian hill station construction and smelt of damp and of aromatic wood; the floorboards hollow underfoot. The head bearer, inside the dimly lit room that doubled up as the bar and dining room, was putting out bottles and glasses on the marble top of a waist-high cabinet. Stevenson was fussing around with the glasses.

‘I won’t apologize,’ said Stevenson as he led the bearer out. ‘But these are the best I could find.’ There was on the tray an assortment of long-stemmed glasses. He opened the bottle of champagne. ‘Congratulatory messages pouring in from the Intelligence Bureau!’ he said holding his glass poised. ‘IB chief, H. Williamson; Home Secretary M.G. Hallet; Home member, Government of India,

H.G. Haig; not to mention the petty backbiting that's doing the rounds.' He toasted the space between them. 'But first we must hear the informal account from the man himself.'

'Well,' said Waumsley. 'After what happened with Cameron, I wasn't in much of a mood for bravado. Once I got the message from the DIB, I had the entire Potiya detachment assembled – thirty-five sepoy in all. Accompanying us were three ASIs and three constables. It was one of those very dark moonless nights and the guide led us through very thick jungles. The house stood in a small clearing. Matilal, my havaladar, began to post the men around at regular intervals, trying to complete the cordon when he noticed a gap that needed filling. Just then he saw the flash of a torch and heard the report of a revolver. He ordered the men to fire back. A shriek and a splash came to his ears. He realized someone had fallen into a tank. The firing had ceased on both sides and Matilal approached the company commander for bombs and torches, but because of the intense darkness they decided to remain still and silent lest the soldiers end up shooting each other. They were standing thus, when Rifleman Man Bahadur Khatri heard the rustling of bamboo leaves and walked towards the sound. He walked into a thin slight man. At the same time Lance Naik Nar Singh Khatri and Rifleman Kesh Bahadur Khatri grabbed hold of a second man. I was informed sometime ... after midnight?'

'A neatly carried out operation.' Angus buried his face in ice-cold champagne.

'The police carried out their part of the job the next morning.' Waumsley continued. 'The inmates of the house were arrested; combing operations carried out, which yielded a bundle of exercise books recovered from the tank. Surjya Sen's handwriting was identified as well as a second careful precise one which documented instructions on the use of explosives and preparations of bombs! They also came up with a bloodstained chador in a ditch under a bamboo clump; a trail of blood that ran for about a mile and was lost at the bank of a khal; and a pair of Burmese sandals ... the kind a woman would wear.'

Angus thought he saw Waumsley wink but he couldn't be sure. The bearer topped up the glasses and handed out the eats. 'Backbiting, you said?' He turned to Stevenson. 'What does the intelligence grapevine have to say?'

'Well!' said Stevenson. He had propped himself against the balustrade, arms folded, ankles crossed. He was a thin tall man with a pale skin that bordered on

translucency that spoke of long years in India. ‘I happen to know that Hands, who had initially commended the courage and presence of mind displayed by the two riflemen, has withdrawn his statement. And Commissioner A.J. Dash has submitted this to R.N. Reid, the Bengal chief secretary. And I quote: “The DM has revised the estimate of the work of Rifleman Man Bahadur Khatri, Lance Naik Nar Singh Khatri and Rifleman Kesh Bahadur Khatri. Surjya and Brajendra were not trying to rush the cordon under covering fire. They were smartly captured and the difficult operation of cordoning was well carried out by the party. It does not appear however that the arrests call for any special recognition to individuals. The capture of Surjya Sen was lucky as the troops arrived just in time. Delay of one or two minutes might have meant failure to find him in the shelter.”’

‘I would imagine,’ murmured Angus, ‘that Kenneth Wigram is not amused.’

‘And old Hallet has been playing up quite deliberately,’ replied Stevenson. ‘Wigram’s note to Hallet was rather pointed. I am told he said he preferred to accept the report submitted by the British officer who was on the spot at the time rather than that of the district magistrate whose opinion must be based on subsequent investigation. “It is rather curious,” he wrote and I quote, “to find the DM ascribing this success to luck considering the special efforts that have been made by the Government of India, by the Bengal government, by the police, and by ourselves to set up an organization capable of dealing with terrorism. It really does not matter whether the troops arrived just in time or several hours in advance of the time, but what does matter is the fact that they managed to get into position before the quarry escaped.” Wigram also added that he got the impression that both the district magistrate and the commissioner are under an apprehension that the reward promised for the arrest of Surjya Sen will be claimed by, or paid to, the military. “Would you explain to them,” he has insisted to Hallet, “that the military does not expect or accept monetary awards for doing their duty? On occasions, local governments have recognized the work of individuals in the army by presenting them with small tokens of their gratitude such as watches, etc., but it is entirely foreign to our ideas and our customs. The reward promised is still at the disposal of the governor for distribution to civil officials at his discretion.”’

Angus helped himself to the tray of tiny cocktail sandwiches held at his elbow – a welcome change from the months of unwavering diet of camp mourghee – the chewy flesh of the tough old backyard warriors that exercised their sinews until

the very last, giving the cook and his blade a run for their money.

‘Hallet sent a copy of Wigram’s letter to the Bengal chief secretary who replied that that there was no proposal of giving the Rs 10,000/- to the army soldiers. And this again was dutifully conveyed to Wigram.’

A little muscle ridged itself on Waumsley’s cheek. He said nothing as he sat staring out into the treacherous Indian night.

‘And is Wigram taking it lying down?’ asked Angus.

‘He,’ Stevenson enunciated the words with care, stressing each one deliberately, ‘has sent Hallet a handwritten note: “No harm done. I think we are right in our surmise that the people on the spot are anxious lest the award be claimed by or paid to the soldiers.”’

‘Sahib,’ the head bearer was standing before them, limbs stiffened. ‘Dinner is ready.’

TWENTY-FIVE

KALPANA DUTT

‘They missed me by a hair’s breadth,’ said Phutu-da. ‘I thought their bullets would get me this time.’

Kalpana edged her way into the cluster around him. She found herself suddenly short of breath. The loose control over her emotions had been tightened over the last few months but she had no doubt about their capacity to trouble her.

Phutu-da had been talking to a few youths by the edge of a pukur, a little before sundown, when Captain Stevenson and his plain-clothes policemen made a sudden appearance. Making a dash for it, Phutu-da had fled across the fields and disappeared into the village of Beedgram. The villagers had tumbled out of the huts to watch the police launch a hunt. No. They had not seen anyone run past. They had never heard of Tarakeshwar Dastidar nor seen the photograph being held out. Men, women and children dropped whatever they were doing to scrutinize the picture and discuss the matter at length. They had never laid eyes on this absconder before. Stevenson had been forced to leave, fuming impotently. Beedgram would pay for their silence. A collective fine would be coming their way in addition to soldiers rampaging through homes and fields in a purported search for evidence.

The money for the fine that Hands had levied after the Pahartali raid was pouring in and Rs 63,500/- of Rs 80,000/- had come in. But information was still not coming forth.¹

‘They are being cautious as to who they fire upon these days,’ said Mahendra. ‘Ever since the day the Gurkhas fired upon two innocent Muslim boatmen who had panicked and tried to run away, there has been a hue and cry in Delhi. The orphaned sons of one and the widowed mother of the second have been granted maintenance ... They cannot afford to hand out too many such maintenances.’

‘But there is good news.’ Phutu-da broke in triumphantly. The days of uncertainty were over. He was firmly back in control of the IRA as Master-da’s successor. ‘A contact has been made with Master-da in jail.’

A hush descended on the group. Sukhendu Dutt, who had left Bengal to build up the organization in Bihar and had been arrested in the Deogarh Conspiracy, and Amulya Biswas, again a political prisoner, had inducted a number of jail employees and had succeeded in establishing contact outside with Pannalal who worked at Ram Chandra Singh’s soda water shop on the banks of the Lal Dighi. Their message was that they were in communication with Master-da. The Mogh sweeper, who changed refuse baskets in the cells, slipped in letters into the sand in the baskets.

‘Sailesh Ray has, according to my instructions, taken up the post of a resident tutor in a house close to the jail. He will be able to maintain close contact and will pass on the weapons required to free Master-da.’

MAHENDRA CHOUDHURY

Mahendra’s agents had brought back news: a youth had been spotted loitering about the banks of the Lal Dighi. Some ten minutes later a man had come out from the jail and had gone and sat near the Public Library. The youth had waited a few minutes before going to sit beside the man. Umesh Chandra De, a DIB sub-inspector who was on secret watch duty, had seen them and had returned with reinforcements.

The youth had turned out to be Sailesh Ray, a student of Chittagong College, and the man a jail warder named Fazlur Rehman. But what had caught the sub-inspector’s notice had been Sailesh’s desperate attempts at swallowing. The twenty-two-year-old had been pinned down and a strip of sodden paper extracted from his throat. It carried the most amazing message: Chloroform 6 files, liquid ammonia 8 ounces, senoplate, sulphuric acid 1 ounce, potassium cyanide, 2 daggers, baby 2, food 24. The marked items won’t be sent now. But will keep ready for when required. Car outside Dutt’s dispensary.

A watch had been placed immediately over the house in which Sailesh Ray was resident tutor. Word of his arrest had already been made public. In the still of the night Sailesh's student, Sashank, had been seen creeping out of the house with a suitcase in his hand. The detective had followed him. The child had left it in a neighbour's cowshed and tiptoed back. The detective had seized the suitcase and opened it. It had revealed a fully loaded .450 revolver and two live bombs.

KALPANA DUTT

Military camps and vigilance committees had been set up in every village. Boys and youths were not permitted to stir outside their village limits and new faces in the locality were to be reported immediately. Posters brandishing the faces of Tarakeshwar Dastidar and Kalpana Dutt and the rewards that went with each one were strung up at haats and bazaars. The core group was moving steadily southwards. New plans were being put together, explosives and ammunition being manufactured and with it went the ongoing recruitment and training. The newer and younger generation had to be readied. With Master-da's arrest the numbers that were willing to betray them had gone up. The tremendous fear of retribution that was a part of the aura that went with Surjya Sen's group seemed to have lost its potency.

With infinite care a Muslim orderly, in the pay of District Magistrate H.S. Hands, had been cultivated. The day and time had been fixed. Kalpana, Lecturer and Shanti Sen, dressed as Muslims, had waited that evening below the tila for the signal. They were to make their way up and hide in the dining room until the magistrate came in for his dinner. But before the light could flash from atop, a few Muslim coachmen had appeared and made a beeline for Kalpana even though her head was wrapped up in a pugree and her body cloaked in voluminous shawls against the winter chill. It had been a tip-off and had it not been for Lecturer's flashing fists they would have been caught. 'Chor chor,' he had screamed as he joined up with the others. His cries had set the people on the street running past them looking for thieves.

The landlord's son had killed a chicken for dinner. Kalpana scooped up a little rice and worked it with her fingers into a ball soaked with the juices of the fiery

stew. It was a common meal being shared off a large platter. The further into the interiors, the deeper into the Muslim belt and the poorer the people. She was eating the flesh of a chicken for the first time for it was a meat forbidden in Hindu households.

Mahendra ate quietly. There was no attempt at consolation or talk of future plans. He had returned having spent a month in Kolkata for Special Superintendent Nalini Majumdar's daughter's wedding. A youth, a distant relative of the Majumdars, one who would have been a legitimate part of the congregation had been contacted. Mahendra had moved to Kolkata to train him personally and had sent him off on that final day with his blessings. The wedding ceremony began but the father of the bride failed to turn up – not even to give his daughter away. Nalini Babu had not emerged from his room that day.

Phutu-da rose to leave. A shelter had been arranged in Gohira village. He was to go and fix the final details.

‘Tell them very clearly as to who we are,’ Kalpana said, speaking her mind. The family, she had heard, was a large one. ‘Tell them, keeping us means inviting trouble.’ They were to move that very night if it turned out suitable. Mahendra would take his boys back to Sripur from where he coordinated between the Koyepara and Kanungo-para teams.

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Monoranjan De led the way through the dark. The Talukdar brothers were the joint heads of a traditional Hindu joint family. The family home comprised two separate mud homes within a common compound. Purno and Prasanna Talukdar who were waiting up for them ushered them into a bamboo hut built against the wall of the southern house. Phutu-da and Kalpana accompanied by Sudhindra Das slipped in quietly. The bamboo leaves had been closely woven and bore a light plaster of mud. It scarcely let a ray of light escape.

During the day it served as an effective veil, keeping prying eyes out. Only the children came by once or twice and applied an eye, wide with innocence, to the

tiny holes left uncovered by the mud and then dashed away, full of giggles and naughtiness. Several of the little ones were stark naked except for the tinkling of anklet bells and the tiny rings with stones that hung from the central septum of the noses. Heads shaved smooth to keep away the lice and dark eyes rimmed with kohl, they were a fine lot of children, free from the bonds that would no doubt hamper their tiny limbs in the months to come. They were shoed away by the family members who took care to keep them at a distance. The Talukdar brothers had big hearts and their family income provided for the elderly, for unfortunate orphans within the extended family group, for widowed sisters and daughters who might no longer have a place in their matrimonial homes. A couple of new people would go unnoticed in a household such as theirs. A thala of rice and vegetables had been brought by a young relative who poured water for them and indicated they were to leave the utensils for her to remove later. The family was under strict instructions to interact with the guests as little as possible. They would soon be on their way. The day of 18 May passed quietly with little achieved except for the writings that Phutu-da and Kalpana assiduously kept up with.

Khoka-da² was ushered in by Purno Talukdar late in the night. The entry startled Kalpana from sleep. Khoka-da sank to the ground beside her feet.

‘Bhulu-da!’ He had taken to calling her Bhulu-da as if she were a man. His voice caught on a ragged note. ‘Today Ma said something, I never dreamt I would hear from her lips ... she said it would have been better if I had never been born.’

The pain in his voice sat heavy on Kalpana’s chest, choking the words in her throat. She reached out to touch his shoulder. He clung to her feet and buried his face in them. Warm tears trickled on to the soles of her feet. The young man’s body racked with sobs. ‘I have walked out, Bhulu-da. I have said goodbye to her for the last time.’

The darkness seemed to loom up and pool around her like dank water. She could feel its viscosity lapping about the edges of her nose and mouth. The truth was that the pain never really dulled with time. She too had walked out on a mother that loved without condition, a father that dared not sleep at night and carried pouches of agony beneath his eyes trying to keep his child from harm’s way. Like weeping spectres, they would come to sit by her bedside full of accusatory questions for which she no longer had any answers. Sometimes, if she strained her ears, she could hear the faint familiar tinkle of a little silver bell moving, as it

did, in a circling motion, as Thakur-Ma's toothless mouth mumbled prayer after prayer.

The edge of the sky had begun to lighten, sending in little shafts of pale-grey light through the pinpoint holes in the wall.

'Sleep,' Phutu-da whispered.

19 MAY 1933

'The house has been surrounded,' Monoranjan De called out in a low voice and disappeared back into the main house.

Kalpana sprang from the cot, disentangling her feet from the grip of the youth who had fallen asleep while weeping. She pressed her eye against the weave of the wall. To her sleep-fuddled eyes, the bamboo grove stood silent, silhouetted against the pale-grey light. In the black recesses, glinted flashes of silvery blue. Bayonets.

Her arm reached out to shake Phutu-da by the shoulder. No word was required. In a flash, he picked up the revolvers and strapped on the cartridge belt. Kalpana silently followed the motions. Sudhindra and Monoranjan had no need to be roused. They were hovering about like hawks ready to swoop down on their prey.

She applied her eyes to the holes in the walls. The bamboo room was completely closed. There was not a nook nor a cranny through which a gun battle could be fought. The bullets of the soldiers would bring the little shed crashing. Phutu-da picked up a small cloth bag of money and jewellery and pointed to the main house. There was little else to take, for between them they had but three revolvers and a small quantity of explosive reagents. No bombs, nothing. There was no time to pick up the exercise books, not even Phutu-da's work on the manufacture of explosive reagents that he had entitled DR RAMAN.

Phutu-da motioned towards the passage that ran below the ground. They emerged into the house towards the south. Without a word he thrust the bag into

Prasanna Talukdar's hands. 'Someone may come for this.' Prasanna nodded and pointed to a room.

Sudhindra shut the door carefully behind them. A window was open on the southern wall. It was clearer now. The tall strapping men, armed with rifles and bayonets were clearly visible in the predawn light.

'Escape is pointless,' whispered Phutu-da. 'This Jat regiment has come fully prepared.'

'We will fight, Phutu-da. To the end.' Kalpana was surprised that the words were her own. She would go down fighting like Priti. They would all die but waiting out there, ready to carry the torch forward after Phutu-da had gone, were Binod Bihari Dutt and Mahendra Choudhury. 'All is not lost.'

She flattened herself against the wall by Phutu-da's side. They took their positions alongside the open window and picked up their revolvers. It was the start of yet another unequal battle against the forces of the British Empire.

The revolver bullets aimed through the window shot into the bamboo groves, letting loose a hail of rifle bullets that landed about the room. Not one had entered through the window but it unleashed an instant wailing. The women and children! Kalpana's heart lurched, as a toddler twisted its way out of its mother's grasp and ran into the periphery of her vision. A man ran after it, snatching it out of view but soon the shrieking and keening had the little ones panicking again.

But it was a heart-stopping cry, raw and hoarse, drawn from the very depths of a man's gut that sent her heart thudding. 'My brother has been killed.' The voice was silenced in the next instant. Only the softness of the wailing seemed to hang in the air.

'Surrender. Stop firing. Kalpana Dutt, if you are there, come out.' The announcements were being made during the brief lull in the firing. The six rounds in the revolvers had been used up. Sudhindra and Khoka-da were quickly replacing the chambers with the handmade ones. Kalpana took aim again but the chamber would not revolve. She shook it and thumped it. It was no use ... the design was faulty.

They were calling out again. 'Surrender.'

Phutu-da was still firing away but the rest of the weapons had all jammed.

‘Phutu-da, the Talukdar family is at grave risk because of us. Let me go out first,’ Kalpana said. ‘Seeing me, they will not shoot.’

There was a faraway look in his eyes. Those large calm beautiful eyes were moist like limpid brown pools. It was as if he were taking his last look at her.

‘The rest of you remain behind me and make a run for it. Death is a certainty but if even one person can escape it will be worth it,’ she pleaded. She took her position beside the door. Crouching behind her was Khoka-da with Sudhindra and Phutu-da to the side. The door had been opened barely a crack when flurry of bullets brushed past Kalpana’s left arm, rattling her from head to foot. A small voice said, ‘Ma’. She turned to see Khoka-da on the floor, making a strange popping noise. Phutu-da dropped to his knees and ripped the blood-soaked shirt open. The intestines struggled to get past the blood that boiled furiously over. Kalpana shut her eyes. ‘He’s gone.’ She heard him say.

The firing outside had not abated and nor had the wailing. The plan of submitting alive had not been thought through and as a result no sign of surrender had been offered. But now it was clear: surrender and spare the family that had sheltered them.

‘Give me all the weapons, Phutu-da,’ Kalpana pleaded. ‘I will take them outside and tell them we are surrendering.’

She called from the window. The jamadar of the regiment sent a chowkidar who came up to the window. He took the three revolvers from her hands.

‘Come out one by one with your hands up,’ the jamadar called. ‘Strip to the waist before coming out.’

‘And me?’ she called back. ‘You expect me to do the same?’

‘Yeh sher ka bachcha hai,’ she heard a rough voice say. ‘A lion cub, that’s what she is.’

Kalpana walked out in her sari and shemiz, arms raised above her head. The firing had stopped. The children had quietened but the women continued to beat their breasts and keen. They sat on the doorstep and as Kalpana stepped past, her

eyes fell on Purno Talukdar's body sprawled in the mud. His blood had seeped over a large area. A little beyond lay Prasanna Talukdar. She could not be sure whether he still breathed. She could not bear to look. Averting her eyes, she skirted the pool of blood. To the left, in a line, sat a few other male members of the family and Monoranjan De, who had first warned them. They were drenched in blood. Kalpana was certain they had suffered bullet injuries until she realized they had been victims of lathi blows.

There was so much of blood that she felt giddy. Suddenly, there was Jamadar Hussain standing before her. A heavy meaty hand descended on her face. 'Nahi.' Voices roared in her ears. The hand was preparing to strike a second time when it was caught in mid-air. 'Haath nahi lagaana.' About seven or eight soldiers had surrounded her. They led her away defiantly. The jamadar's face flushed a dark red but he thought better of arguing with his men. Kalpana was made to sit down and a man took off his pugree and tied her arms behind her back. The piteous moaning of the women ripped at her insides. She could decipher some of their words ... the master of the house had failed to raise his arms above his head in time.

Phutu-da came out followed by Sudhindra. A rain of boots and lathis descended on them. Suddenly, the soldiers began to straighten up. Major Keen, the officer commanding the 1/9 Royal Jats, had arrived. He looked Kalpana up and down and then went up to Phutu-da. The boot-clad foot aimed a kick at the eye. Kalpana saw it turn into a mass of blood. She screamed in anguish as Phutu-da flailed on the ground. Next it was Sudhindra's turn.

She wasn't quite sure when all the people had turned up. The numbers seemed to be growing all the time even as she walked and stumbled, dragged by ropes, along the five miles to the Tulatali Military Cantonment. They jostled and clamoured, brushing bodily against her. Her hair, falling in tangled knots, provided the only privacy possible at the moment. Inquisitive fingers tried to breach the curtain for a glimpse of her face. An insolent hand pushed its way into her mouth before being jerked away. The tears and the misery formed a veil of their own and though she did not see the face, the lingering taste of a mouthful of halva remained.

TWENTY-SIX

KALPANA DUTT

They sat in the dock together. The trial – the Chittagong Second Supplementary Armoury Raid Case – had begun without delay on 15 June 1933. It wasn't held at court. Instead an office room in the jail, belonging to the detective branch, had been converted into a courtroom.

Kalpana was meeting Master-da after four months. He had changed. He stroked her hair and said, 'My time is over. I sit in my cell and write so that you may read my words long after I have gone.'¹ The intensity had gone from his voice. It made her sad. He spoke as he had never spoken before. The voice and the tone that she remembered evoked the lost past and filled her with longing.

Master-da had taken it for granted that he would not escape the noose. The lawyers spoke and argued; none of them seemed to hold his attention. He spoke softly to Phutu-da all the time. The work had to be carried on ... Master-da, Kalpana realized, was handing over charge. Within two months, it was all over. On 14 August 1933, the president of the tribunal, W.McC. Sharpe, and the two other members R.K. Ghose and Khondakar Ali Taib came to read the verdict: There were no eyewitnesses that could definitely prove Surjya Sen's role in the armoury raid or at Jalalabad. But the tribunal guided by the expertise of Mr Bennet, the handwriting expert, relied on the writings of the three undertrials to clinch the case. In view of the fact that she was just a young woman of nineteen years, Kalpana was awarded transportation for life. Surjya Sen was given death and Tarakeshwar Dastidar death.

There was a light touch on the top of her head. Master-da's voice said softly, 'There will be an appeal ... you will see.'²

She sat cold as stone. It was impossible: They had no case against either of them. The voice, the one that was so beloved, whispered as it had never done before.

‘Bhulu,’ said Phutu-da. ‘In case I make it back ... will you wait for me?’

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For over a month, the newspapers discussed the case and its fallout.

APPEALS DISMISSED.

INDIAN TERRORISTS.

CALCUTTA, November 14.

One of the most sensational terrorist conspiracy trials ever heard in India ended to-day when three judges (two Indian and one British) of the Calcutta High Court dismissed the appeals of Surjya Sen (who is said to be the leader of the Terrorist movement), Tarakeshwar Dastidar, and Miss Kalpana Dutt, against their conviction and sentence by a special tribunal at Chittagong.

Sen and Dastidar were sentenced to death, and Miss Dutt to transportation for life. They were tried in connection with, among other incidents, the Chittagong armoury raid, the murder of Inspector Tarapada³ Mukherji, the death of Captain Cameron, and the Pahartali raid.⁴

OUTBREAK FEARED

CHITTAGONG AREA

CALCUTTA, November 19

Troops and police are closely watching the centres of terrorist activity in East Bengal to prevent outrages which have been threatened, following the passing of the death sentence on Surjya Sen, a leader of the Chittagong revolutionaries. At Chittagong the curfew order is being rigidly enforced, the streets are being patrolled and all Hindu youth are being compelled to carry identity cards. European's houses are being guarded, and Government officials are being protected day and night by armed sentries.

A number of arrests have been made in various centres. At Dinajpur, the police have found a quantity of ammunition concealed in a girls' school.⁵

Cable news in brief

Indian Absconder Caught

Kali Kinkar De, a notorious absconder wanted for an attempt to blow up the Sessions Court at Chittagong was arrested yesterday after a village fight by the police disguised as peasants.⁶

ROUNDING UP OF TERRORISTS

Vigorous Measures in India

CALCUTTA, December 15

Vigorous measures which have been taken by troops and police in the Chittagong district since January, have resulted in the arrest of 24 persons wanted for terrorist crimes, including murders of Europeans. A large quantity of

arms, ammunitions and bombs were seized.

Two men for whom the authorities were searching for two years in connection with an alleged plot to dynamite the Chittagong court offices, were arrested at a village near Chittagong. Dressed in a woman's clothes and wearing long hair a Bengali, who was wanted for participation in a terrorists attack on the Chittagong auxiliary force armoury four years ago, was arrested at Rangoon.⁷

BRITISH PLAN CONDEMNED

Indian Federation Liberals adopt new policy

Calcutta, December 28

The first shot in what is certain to develop into an India-wide campaign against the White Paper was fired at the annual conference of the Liberal Federation at Madras. The Federation in committee agreed to a resolution condemning the existing reforms and the British Government's plans, and demanding a "generous" scheme for granting India an equal partnership in the Empire.

The solution which is certain to be passed in open conference, followed others, sympathizing with Gandhi's movement on behalf of the untouchables, protesting against the position of Indians in South Africa, and urging the withdrawal of repressive measures against terrorists to pave the way for a 'policy of conciliation'.

The Federation has thus adopted practically the Congress Party's policy, doubtless in an attempt to regain its influence which is rapidly waning.

The Federation which contains much moderate political opinion has often given the Government support in the past and opposed the Congress. Though it is known that many of the members are dissatisfied with the White Paper, the latest development coupled with the attempt to adopt the Congress Programme comes as a surprise and is regarded as the death knell of the party, which has revealed little courage in its policy in the recent years.

COMBAT ARMS SMUGGLING

Wider powers to cope with the menace of smuggling arms for the use of the terrorists are proposed by a Bill which the Government of Bengal will place before the Legislature next session.

Recently, there has been an intense and widespread recrudescence of the activities of terrorists and armed brigands who are using arms smuggled through Calcutta and Chittagong by seamen. As a result of the close watch now kept by the police, these smugglers are now selling the weapons through recognized brokers against whom the new legislation is chiefly directed.

The penalties will include banishment from the Province, failure to comply with this order entailing two years imprisonment with hard labour.

[The British Government's proposals for a reformed constitution for India were issued as a White Paper in March. The proposals provide for autonomy for the Provinces and a Federal Government, the Federation consisting of the autonomous Provinces and the Indian States.]⁸

KALI KINKAR DE

Kali Kinkar shared a cell with Sudhindra Das.⁹ He had been caught from Hailash Dwip. Master-da and Phutu-da were in the same jail, awaiting their deaths. But there was no way of sending them a message, let alone catch a glimpse. Kalpana had been moved out of Chittagong to the Rajshahi Central Jail. She was on her way to the jail at Hijli.

A letter arrived from Premlata. On extreme compassionate grounds, it was delivered to Kali. He had been permitted to correspond with his wife. The letter lay unanswered.

‘Why?’ asked Sudhindra.

Kali had no reply. The days stretched on endlessly. The trial had begun. He made his trips to the courtroom and back, paying scant attention to the growing pile of letters or the question in Sudhindra’s eyes. He made no comment when Sudhindra opened a few and he did not object when Sudhindra penned a reply to Premlata. He did not ask if Sudhindra used his name.

A commotion made its way into the jail one evening. Bombs had been thrown at a crowd. There had been an attempt once again on European lives. The sipahis and warders could not contain the news. It made its way about like a flash of lightning. Despite Surjya Sen and Tarakeshwar Dastidar being safely in their cells, an outrage of this scale had been attempted. The newspapers were on display on the streets the next day.

BOMBS THROWN AT CROWD

Attempt on Lives of Europeans

INDIAN TERRORISTS

An attempt at a mass murder of Europeans by Indian terrorists failed at Chittagong on Sunday, when bombs were thrown at a crowd by four Hindu youths. One person was slightly wounded.

Calcutta, January 8.

Another terrorist outrage took place in Chittagong yesterday when what was evidently an attempt at a mass murder of Europeans providentially failed.

The outrage occurred at 5.30 in the evening when the crowd, which included a section of Europeans, was watching the closing stages of a cricket match. Suddenly bombs were thrown at Europeans by four Hindu youths. None of them

were killed, the only casualty being Mr M. F. Cleary (superintendent of Police, Chittagong), who was slightly wounded in the hand. One of the assailants, however, was killed instantaneously, and two others were severely wounded while a fourth was arrested.

TWO BOMBS WERE “DUDS”

It is believed that three bombs in all were thrown, and that the Europeans present owed their miraculous escape to the fact that two of these bombs failed to explode. Several live bombs and a revolver were recovered from the assailants. One of the three men in custody, it is stated, has been identified as Krishna Choudhury who is an armoury raid absconder. This is the first terrorist outrage in Bengal since the murder of Mr B. E. J. Burge (sic)¹⁰ in September – last year at Midnapore.¹¹

It was the IRA led by Binod Bihari Dutt lodging a strong protest against the verdict given for Master-da and Phutu-da. A great pity, thought Kali, the security cover would have been so heavy that boys would not have been able to approach beyond a limit. The story that went around said that Mr Cleary had been approaching the grounds in a motor car when he noticed two youths standing on the road. His suspicions had been aroused and he stopped the car and leapt out with his armed orderly. He challenged the men and Nityaranjan Sen flung a bomb which exploded close to him but without doing any damage. As Cleary grappled with his assailant, the driver dashed out and fired, wounding one of the men but also injuring the master in the hand. The second youth, Himangshu Bimal Chakraborty, ran away but was wounded by the orderly. While this was happening, Harendralal Chakraborty and Krishna Choudhury ran up the hillock on which about fifty Europeans, men and women, were sitting and threw two bombs into their midst. Both bombs failed to explode. Subsequently, one youth fired six shots at the Europeans with a revolver, but without hitting anyone. He was overpowered by Major Brett, a spectator. Krishna Choudhury attempted to escape but was shot at and severely wounded. Krishna, who had participated in the armoury raid and at Jalalabad, had been sent by his family to hide amongst

the tribal Chakmas for close to two years. The boy had made a final comeback. He and Harendralal would now have to hang. Lord Willingdon had issued a warning to terrorists: GOVERNMENT WILL GOVERN ... the terrorist movement which endeavours to achieve certain revolutionary aims by assassinating government servants is one against which the full resources and the power of the government will continue to be unhesitatingly employed.¹²

By evening, there was news that held the attention of the inmates and the Indian staff. The zamindar of Gairala village had returned from a fruitful day in town and had sat down to a sumptuous dinner on the verandah of his house. Sudden wild shrieks had brought the neighbours running. They found the zamindar's wife still standing with the serving bowl in her hand. She had returned from the kitchen to find her husband's head rolling about on his plate of rice. There was no trace of the culprits and besides it was too dark to look for them. Brajen Sen and Khirodprabha Biswas, who were both in jail, were satisfied that justice had been done.¹³ A strict curfew order had once again been imposed and troops and armed police stationed at strategic points patrolled through the night. A collective fine of £300/- had been imposed on the inhabitants of several villages for harbouring 'wanted' terrorists.¹⁴

The sweeper had come in to change the refuse baskets. He narrowed his eyes and shot a glance at them before leaving. Sudhindra and Kali Kinkar waited for the doors to close before they scrabbled through the sand. Two little pieces of paper emerged, folded several times over. There was writing in there, miniscule and precise, written by a hand that held the little stub of the pencil at the edge of the lead: Master-da's hand. And the second was in Phutu-da's. It was their last message to their boys.

'Spare a thought to the woman you have married,' said Sudhindra. He held out a letter. 'Her uncle has passed away, your mother has passed away and she lives in the constant humiliation of being dependent on others.'

Kali took it. Release me, it said. Premlata had received Kali's news. He was to be sent to the Andamans. One day you had ordered me ... and I have obeyed until this day. Now I have only one prayer, release me from the promise.

Kali picked up the pen.

Priti, I was unable to make you happy. All your hopes have been dashed. I feel

very guilty. I don't have the courage to increase my burden of sins and nor do I have the strength to encourage you with false promises. I release you.

He muttered a few lines in prayer, seeing in his mind's eye the brown-faced, strong-limbed young girl who had laboured by his side pounding coal, carrying heavy sacks, pleading only to be permitted to work by his side. He pictured her now as she slipped the little ampoule into her mouth and traced the cool outlines with the tip of her tongue. A quick bite and the precious contents would spill out. It had been her only security in all these years.

ANANDA PRASAD GUPTA

The 'Maharaja' had anchored off Ross Island. The news spread through the block of cells and the yard. Ananda took to his feet, running to find a good place. The arrival of new prisoners was the only source of information. Master-da's trial had begun. That was common knowledge but the verdict was yet to come.

He jostled with the rest to find a place closest to the door of the yard.

'If they don't hang him, they will bring him here.' Suresh whispered excitedly in his ear. A wave of pleasure ran through Ananda's body. Master-da in the Andamans with them! It would be like the old days once again – the laughter, the chatter and the talks on history. The matters of the world would be discussed and the things that must be done to set it right again.

The jangle of shackles! The awkward gait of men walking with legs splayed out by chains and weighted iron rings. The heavy doors creaked open and a cheer went up greeting the newcomers. The din of metal blocked out every other sound. The new men came to the centre and stopped. A nerve-racking expectancy crackled in the air. One head raised itself high and took in the yard bristling with onlookers.

'Have you got the news? Master-da has been hanged!'

He felt the words physically as if he had been kicked. A silence followed. One that stretched and elongated until the yard began to echo. The words bounced off

the walls and flagstones growing into a deafening thunder. Then a soft whispering took its place.

‘They had no evidence against the man who masterminded the revolution. The watchers’ diary was the cornerstone of the case and the tribunal had admitted that the conviction of Surjya Sen was based on association alone, for there was no oral evidence. He had been seen with the ones that had taken part; had gone into hiding just after the raids. It had led to the inference that he was a part of it. But what had done Master-da in were his own writings: the prosecution had used them to their advantage.’¹⁵

The newcomers moved off. Everything became the same as it had always been: the warders resumed charge; the sharp shadows of the trees, the square of light on the flagstones, the day ahead with its work waiting to be done. He had stood at this spot many times telling himself that it was the price he had to pay for the successes they had enjoyed. The successes ... they all seemed ephemeral now as if they never had happened.

ANANTA LAL SINGH

Master-da was dead.

Ananta lay on his bed counting the number of ticks and the tocks before the soft knocking would send him flying from his bed. There it was: thock thock, two together and then a pause. And a last soft thock! Pramod¹⁶ had come. The children raced, their feet dancing as they flew over the flooded nallas running through the fields, jumping across dry ditches till at last they stood with the waters of the Karnaphuli swirling about their ankles. Sampans were out early, skimming along, their sails proud and taut in the early morning breeze.

The rim of the glowing disc appeared over the horizon and threw a handful of abeer into the river. The dark waters turned a rosy red, threatening to dye his feet permanently. The voice of a boatman, singing in his coarse rural dialect, came floating across. It was time to face his destiny. The air was fresh and cool and the boys gulped it down in deep draughts. Pramod pointed silently to a hut on the

bank and turned back.

Ananta presented himself before the door. Knock thrice, that is the signal, he had been told. He raised his hand and wondered what it was that he expected to find. Then he pushed gently to open the door and with three fingers traced the sign on his chest. His eyes were still adjusting to the dark: There was a cot and on it sat a man. Just one? But the man recognized him. ‘Oh! I understand,’ he said. ‘You are Ananta. You are the Ramamurthy of your school, are you not?’

His eyes had been busy taking in the rest of the room, but a flush of pleasure welled up within: class eight and already well known. Ramamurthy, the strong man who made an elephant walk across his chest, was his hero. Since that first show there had been many shows in Chattogram Municipal School during the lunch breaks: Ananta became Ramamurthy and a bench with eight students balancing on it, the elephant. But where was the object of desire? A table, a bookshelf and few books! Baas? That was all? He turned his attention to the man. There was a reed mat that had been spread over the cot. No pillow, no almirah, not even a trunk. Why had he come? The only thing here was an image of Kali ... and the man.

‘It seems you are disappointed.’

‘I had hoped to find a revolver. I want to learn how to use it.’

‘And what if I turn out to be the police?’

‘No, no,’ Ananta spoke in a placating tone. His eyes were still scanning the room for daylight had come pouring in. ‘Why should you be a policeman?’

‘Well, then let’s get down to the hard truth. I have no revolver and nor can I give you one.’

‘Can I ask?’ Ananta said meekly.

‘Certainly. Go ahead.’

‘Are you a swadeshi? Have ever been involved in one of those swadeshi dacoities?’

‘No. I can lay no claim to having done any such thing. There is nothing that I

have done that will please you.'

Man and boy stared at each other in silence, the disappointment evident on Ananta's face.

'Tell me, is being Ramamurthy the same as being a patriot? To work for the country, one has to steel one's mind. A powerful body alone is not good enough.'

The words were difficult to comprehend. But Ananta knew better than to open his mouth.

The man kept talking softly. His voice seemed to fill the room. 'Place your hand on your heart and think. Evaluate the strength of your mind. Imagine the police have you. Picture the terrible atrocities they practise. Will you be able to keep your lips sealed? Will you be able to escape ... spend the rest of your days without real food, without sleep, always on the run?'

Ananta had come prepared for this question. But the man put up his hand. 'No, go home now. I give you a week's time to think it over.'

This was the same man who had come to his home a couple of months after the successful conclusion of the Paraikora dacoity. Ananta, who had not gone back to school, had been pleading with Ma to send him to the Bengal Technical Institution where Ganesh was a student. Baba had snorted at the proposal: you expect him to study? Ananta was spending his days, while Ma worked on Baba, mooning about in his room, books strewn around, pretending to be absorbed in study. Master-da had come in and shut the door softly. Look Ananta, I have been thinking. We have built this group with youths like you. But what do I have to contribute? I neither have the physical ability nor the kind of wealth required. Julu has the right qualities: his army background, his knowledge of weapons and actual experience of war. He can work hard, even come up with some money when it is required and he is the one that is actually training you people. I have no such talent. Why should I sit above everyone else as the party head? He had stared at Master-da, uncomprehending. Look, Master-da had continued, I cannot even move around on a cycle, keeping in touch with all the members. I cannot supervise their exercise regimen or the battle exercises. Even if I want to buy a couple of books for the group, I have to depend on you or Nirmal Babu for the money. I feel so helpless. Is it right for me to be sitting as the leader? It is as much a loss for me as it is for all of you. If a worthwhile leader is not present

and we have just a figurehead, we are doomed. One must be straightforward. So you and Nirmal Babu discuss this and decide. Let me go. If you don't want to be the leader because you are too young, let us go and request Nirmal Babu to take over.

The deep solemn voice still rang in his ears – lovely and calm ... from such a skinny little body! No one who had not heard it could believe it. When every party in every zila was battling over who should get to lead, here was a man who, after being chosen unanimously, was making such a proposal! It was very strange. Bengal's most loved revolutionary's questioning of himself still echoed in Ananta's head. What right do I have? What ability do I have? I will hand over everything to the one who is most able. Why was the assistant headmaster of a high school speaking to a mere schoolboy like an equal?

'That is why you were our leader,' Ananta whispered, hoping somehow, somewhere Master-da heard.

KALI KINKAR DE

Kali arrived at the Cellular Jail in 1935. The boys, even the young ones, had grown accustomed to the dark narrow cells, with a slit of a ventilator at the far end which afforded no view. They had grown comfortable with the scorpions that scuttled in and out, crusty bodies clicking as they made their way, tails poised dangerously. The bed was a wooden plank and the much used blanket, infested with bedbugs. A wooden neck ticket, with personal details, hung from a metal ring riveted around each one's neck but their limbs were free, the shackles having been removed a month after their arrival. Kali found them racing gaily down the corridors towards the central guard tower, down the staircase and out into the open yard. Meals were no longer eaten in solitary confinement and the slop of sticky Burma rice, the watery arhar dal and the rotis that reeked of the worms that infested the flour could be shared together. The only greens permitted were the long dry woody pods of the sajna danta. Not a shred of coconut ever found its way into the food despite the abundance. The hunger strike of May 1933 had achieved little, barring three deaths due to force-feeding. But it had not been something the Chittagong boys had been party to. Subodh

Roy, like many of the youngsters, bore coir burns over his arms acquired during the long hours of twisting coconut fibre into rope. But they had won several concessions – ones the prisoners had been struggling for since December 1932: lighter labour, a library with books, facilities for indoor and outdoor games and the right to receive money orders from home. Money could be used to buy more books. Dr Narain Chandra Roy of the Dalhousie Square Bomb Case and Niranjana Sengupta of the Mechhua Bazaar Bomb Case had brought in trunkloads of communist literature. The boys studied the books early in the mornings and gathered once again in the evenings when the teachers took lectures. They read in English and the teachers explained in Bengali.¹⁷ Ananda, who suffered greatly from the injury to his leg, was injected regularly by the jail doctor. He was growing dependent ... breathless if the injection was delayed. They gave him the morphine without hesitation.¹⁸

But this evening the boys waited for Kali Kinkar to speak. He had come prepared with two pieces of paper.

‘I must tell you about that last day. First, I have to clarify that Neelmoni Babu, the deputy jailor, and the sweeper were men that loved and respected Master-da and Phutu-da. The previous week every youth under suspicion had been rounded up in advance and locked up along with the political prisoners. There were amongst them boys with no previous records and nor were any charges instituted against them. The wards were filled beyond capacity. On the morning of 12 January 1934, Neelmoni Babu announced that by four in the afternoon all doors leading to the wards would be locked. Also that a curfew would begin from midnight, one that would last until 5 a.m. the next day. All shops and businesses would have to close and no cars or tikka gharries would be permitted on the streets. Anyone who stepped outdoors would be shot at sight. The jail would pass under the authority of the military during these hours. Captain Stevenson, the MIO, would assume full control.

‘At 3.30 p.m. armed police and soldiers poured into the jail. Most of the regular jail warders disappeared from sight barring one or two jamadars and the officers who showed the soldiers around. The soldiers paced up and down the corridors, their rifles fitted with bayonets.

‘At four o’clock all doors slammed shut. Instantly, the inmates began to shout, “Bande Mataram! Master-da Surjya Sen ki jai! Tarakeshwar Dastidar ki jai!” The walls shook with their cries. They kept it up until 5 a.m. the next morning.

The army and the police seemed very nervous as if someone might snatch Master-da from before their very eyes. They glared and threatened. But the inmates wouldn't quieten down and the soldiers did not dare touch them. Military lorries carrying armed personnel circled the jail. We could hear them rev the engines as they went past.

'Suddenly, we heard Master-da's voice. "Bande Mataram!" he called out. "Death to the Empire! Long live revolution!" Then we heard Phutu-da's voice calling out revolutionary slogans. Each one of the war cries was picked up and repeated by every prisoner.

'We heard Master-da cry out, asking: "Who is here with me today?" Amar Sen, a worker in the political prisoner's ward, called out in his powerful voice. As he took the names we heard Master-da and Phutu-da repeat each one and add "We bless you". "And now we will perform our last puja," they called. The jail fell silent. Master-da's chanting of the Gita floated softly through every corridor, pervading every corner of every cell. It seeped into every heart bringing with it a strange sense of calm. Then Phutu-da raised his voice and sang: "Jibone joto puja holo na shara, Jaani hey jaani tao hoye ni haara"... There are prayers, due in this lifetime, that I have been unable to complete. And yet I know, they have not all been lost.

'Cars screeched to a stop outside the jail gate. The great bell clanged. Some very senior officers had arrived. In a few minutes we heard Master-da call out: "They are taking us to the gallows. BANDE ...". He was stopped before he could complete it. We heard him struggle to say it again a couple of times. But he could not go beyond the word Bande. I believe both Master-da and Phutu-da were as good as dead before they were strung up.

'The bell at the jail gate rang twelve times and the crunch of the lever at the gallows came to our ears. The greatest Indian revolutionary that ever lived was no more.

'Captain Stevenson breathed a sigh of relief. No one would ever steal Surjya Sen from him again. He ordered his men into the cells and wards. It was the beginning of a night that threatened never to end. Political prisoners, being held with or without charge, were beaten and thrashed within an inch of their lives. But each time the soldiers left, the cry of Bande Mataram was taken up again. And Stevenson would order them back in again. This went on until daybreak.¹⁹

‘Several weeks later we learnt from one Nur Ahmed,²⁰ a sipahi in the armed police, that he had accompanied the bodies that very night on to the waiting ‘Renown’. The cruiser sailed out into the Bay of Bengal and as they entered the deep waters, the white men began kicking the corpses. Each one was aiming for the heads. But this time it was the hitherto subservient armed policemen who had been unable to control their tempers. A howl of protest and the whites spun around to find not one but several muskets aimed at them. Quickly regaining their composure, the British ordered the corpses be tied to two iron bars weighted with rocks and dumped into the ocean. The work was done but the mood on board continued to be dangerous. Making good time on the way back to Chittagong, the cruiser waited barely long enough for the officers and sipahis to disembark before setting sail for Singapore.’

The piece of paper in Kali Kinkar’s hand was passed around gingerly. Everyone reached out to touch it reverentially. Master-da’s last words written in his own hand:

My last message – Ideal and Unity.

The hangman’s noose dangles over my head. Death knocks at my door. My mind is racing towards eternity. This is the right time for Sadhana. This is the right time to acknowledge and embrace Death as a dear friend.

My memories of you are sweet and wonderful. These, my brothers and sisters, have enriched my life and kept it from the dullness of monotony. They serve to enthuse me. At this most beautiful, the most exclusive time of my life I give to you – the dream, the dream of independent India. It was an auspicious moment in my life when this dream first inspired me. Like an untiring lunatic bursting with enthusiasm, I chased it all my life. I know not where it is that I have reached. If, before you reach your goal, you feel the icy hands of death just as I do now, then hand over your tasks to those waiting to follow just as I charge you with my responsibilities today.

My friends, march on, march on. Never fall back. The darkness of dependency is fleeing. Look, there goes the light of Independence’s herald. Never give in to despair. Succeed we will. May God bless you.

Never forget 18th April, 1930, the day of Easter Rebellion in Chittagong. Keep the memory of Jalalabad, Juldha, Chandannagar and Dhalghat alive.

Ink in blood and preserve within the inner sanctum of your hearts the names of those who have sacrificed their lives at the altar of Independence.

Let no differences arise within our organization – this is my only request. You, who are within jail and you, who are outside – know that my blessings are with you.

Permit me to seek farewell.

Long live revolution

Bande Mataram

Chittagong Jail

11th Jan, 1934

at 7 P.M.

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

1. Bhupen Dutt, a great admirer of Joteen Mookerjee, had among his band of followers, Joteen Mookerjee's son Tejandranath. The young man helped locate shelters in Chandernagore for the four Chittagong revolutionaries and was arrested soon thereafter. Tegart personally advised Joteen Mookerjee's maternal uncle, Dr Hemanta Kumar Chatterjee, to get Tejendranath married in order to secure his release from jail, adding: 'Is it not enough to have one Joteen Mookerjee once in a while?' Source: Prithwindra Mukherjee (grandson of Joteen Mookerjee and son of Tejendranath).

2. The Argus (Melbourne, Vic.), Friday, 25 April 1930, p. 7.

3. Gandhi's arrest resulted in the working class resorting to violent protests: Textile strike in Sholapur, Maharashtra; dockyard workers in Karachi; Choolai Mill workers in Madras; transport workers and Budge-Budge Mill hands in Calcutta.

4. Letter to Lowman from J.C. Farmer dated 6 May 1930 GOI Home Poll File No. 335/1930.

5. Report of Johnson (No. 860/44-30) dated 30 April 1930, *ibid*

6. Report of Johnson (D.O. No. 821/43-30) dated 26 April 1930, *ibid*.

7. Report on behalf of SP (No. 880/44-30) dated 2 May 1930, *ibid*.

8. Letter to Lowman from Johnson (No. 1025/44-30 dated 12 May 1930, *ibid*.

9. Letter to Lowman from Farmer, quoting the new Police Inspector Khan Sahib Ahsanulla dated 6 May 1930, *ibid*.

10. Report by Johnson dated 27 April 1930, *ibid*.

11. *Modern India 1885 –1947*, Sumit Sarkar.

12. *Inquilab* is the Urdu equivalent of ‘revolution’ and *Zindabad* means ‘long live’.

13. *Deodar*.

14. *Siccun*: the Indian *khansama*’s attempt at saying ‘seconds’. It was the savoury dish that was served after the dessert – usually pieces of fried bread with a topping.

CHAPTER TWO

1. The highest scholarship from Calcutta University for foreign studies in Bengal.

2. The elder sister of Bina Das. Bina Das would attempt to murder the governor in 1932 during the convocation ceremony at Calcutta University.

3. The ash-covered Lord Shiva with his unkempt bleached locks has been identified by Lady Kathleen Tegart as the corpse of a European.

4. Taken from the deposition of Gopi Nath Saha.

5. Taken from the deposition of Gopi Nath Saha.

6. Now Rafi Ahmad Kidwai Road.

CHAPTER THREE

1. Bengalis avoid using the words ‘go’ or ‘going’; ‘I will be back’ is preferred to ‘I am going’; ‘you may come’ actually means ‘you may go’ etc.

2.He was Special Superintendent 1; Nalini M was Special Superintendent 3.

3.Gopi Nath Saha had been hanged on 1 March 1924, Memoirs of an Indian Policeman, Kathleen Francis Tegart.

4.Younie papers, p. 267.

5.Neelkantha or the blue-throated one is another name for Lord Shiva, who is the keeper of poisons. He holds the most dangerous of them all in his throat, to keep it away from mankind. His throat is as a result blue but the poison does not otherwise affect his health.

CHAPTER FOUR

1.Subhas Chandra Bose's elder brother.

2.John Younie's reputation preceded him. After the completion of his Chittagong tenure he was posted to Darjeeling where an attempt was made on the life of Governor Sir John Anderson on 8 May 1934 by the Bengal Volunteers. It came to be known as the Lebong Shooting Case. Judgment was delivered by John Younie on 12 September 1934. Bhawani Bhattacharya and Robi Banerjee were awarded the death sentence twice! Monoranjan Banerjee was to hang only once. Ujjala Majumdar, being a young woman, received twenty years of deportation with fourteen years of rigorous imprisonment; Sukumar Ghosh and Madhu Banerjee fourteen years deportation and Sushil Chakraborty twelve years. The high court reduced the sentences and Robi and Monoranjan Banerjee were deported for life. Youth vs Raj by Sona Roy.

3.Abdul Sovan could still have created mischief by insisting that it was Lokenath Bal who had shot Sergeant Major Farrell but a visit from Lokenath's mother settled the issue and Sovan retracted his statement.

4.Judgment of the Chittagong Armoury Raid Case, adapted from the depositions of Khan Sahib Ahsanulla, Omra Mia, Constable Prasanna K. De, Torab Ali, Sub-inspector Hem Gupta, and Deputy Magistrate Dharendra Mohan Gupta.

5. Yuva-Vidroha part I, Ananta Lal Singh.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Dinesh Majumdar and Anuja Sen of Jugantar had thrown bombs at Tegart at Dalhousie Square. At a distance were Sailen Niyogi, Atul Sen and Kalipada Ghose. Many Jugantar members, including women, were arrested and released later for want of evidence. Youth vs Raj, Sona Roy.

2. Now Red Cross Place.

3. Later Rai Bahadur Satish Ghose.

4. The informer was a resident of Chandannagar who had been to the house.

5. Supposedly said by Sir Charles Augustus Tegart, in reference to the casualty figure at Jalalabad. Quoted in Suresh De's Mukti Sopon Jalalabad and in the interview with Kali Kinkar De by Mallikarjuna Sharma.

6. Rash Bihari Basu and Kanailal belonged to Chandannagar. But Jibon Ghoshal was the first shaheed to be cremated in Chandannagar.

7. The Canberra Times, Wednesday, 3 September 1930, p. 1, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.newsarticle2327794>

8. Benoy Krishna Basu, a fourth-year medical student of Dacca Mitford Medical School, went into hiding. The author Sarat Chandra Chatterji made a public declaration: Tell him I bless him. Youth vs Raj, Sona Roy.

9. Ram Prasanna and Inderdeo.

10. The viceroy, Lord Irwin, had sent a letter on 11 September to the French governor of Pondicherry to thank him warmly for all the assistance.

11. H.G. Tranchell, the British consul in Pondicherry, noted in a confidential letter to Prentice (Home member to the Government of Bengal) that the French

governor was nervous regarding the repercussions in Paris and awkward questions being put to the minister of colonies in the Chambre des Deputes for “various notabilities of the town went, it appears, quite hysterical about the young man’s death, quite overlooking the crimes he had committed”. The mayor of Chandernagore had gone all the way to Pondicherry to present to the governor a resolution of protest passed by the citizens of Chandernagore against the British police action. The governor of French India had asked the Government of Bengal to write to the Government of India, “to say that it asked for that service of the Administrator as a most urgent necessity for the safety of Bengal and that everything during the raid was carried out according to French law, the British police forces being as it were merely storm troops”. So shaken was the governor that, according to Tranchell, he wanted the Government of India to forward the letter to the Foreign Office as soon as possible so that the British ambassador in Paris could officially explain it to the French government.

CHAPTER SIX

1.The exact circumstances of the reconciliation are not known. But it is true that Surjya Sen believed that Ananta Lal Singh had surrendered in order to extract the retractions.

2.Master-da was, at this time, in a shelter at Saroatali village, across the Karnaphuli.

3.She agreed after a lot of persuasion but the plan fell through and Premlata did not have to go through with it.

4.Dinesh Majumdar was given a life term but he escaped two years later from Midnapore Jail by vaulting over the prison walls. He was rearrested on 22 May 1933, along with Nalini Das and Jagadananda Mukherji, after firing at the forces on Cornwallis Street (Bidhan Sarani). He was hanged on 9 July 1934. Youth vs Raj, Sona Roy.

5.Bengali for silly.

6.Do And Die, p. 21, Manini Chatterjee.

7. Do And Die, p. 180, Manini Chatterjee.
8. Introduced by Kali Chakraborty (Pundit).
9. Do And Die, p. 187, Manini Chatterjee.
10. Rameshwar was Ram Krishna Biswas and Deboprasad Gupta's classmate and lived close to the Paltan Maidan.
11. Dalhousie Square has been renamed BBD Bagh to honour the martyrs.
12. British Medical Journal, 27 December 1930, pp. 1105 and 1106.
13. He was kept in the condemned cell at Alipur Jail and hanged on 7 July 1931. Medinipur's BV branch took revenge by murdering James Peddie, the district magistrate, at the Midnapore District School's education exhibition. Bimal Dasgupta and Jatijiban Ghose shot him and disappeared into the crowd on 7 April 1931. Bimal Dasgupta was arrested on 29 October 1931 during an attempt to murder Mr Villiers. Youth vs Raj, Sona Roy.
14. The Argus (Melbourne, Vic. : 1848–1954), Friday 5 December 1930, p. 7.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Later when Kalpana met her again at Hijli Jail, she received an explanation: had Putu-di owned up to the fact that she was pretending to be married while in Chandannagar, yet another case would have been slapped against her and Shashadhar Acharya.
2. Mahanayak Surjya Sen Chattogram Biplob Pratham Khand, p. 168, Ananta Lal Singh.
3. At Goshai Danga, Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930–1934 Aalokmela, p. 104.
4. Ardhendu Guha.
5. Apurva Sen.

6.Modern India 1885 –1947, Sumit Sarkar, p. 306.

7.Younie Papers, p. 94.

8.The Canberra Times, 21 April 1930. George V reigned until 20 January 1936.

9.Younie Papers, p. 51.

10.The origin of the slang word ‘quod’ was introduced into the English language by British Tommies returning home from India.

11.The people did get back the promised money at the end of the War. But there was a catch: the rupee was devalued. For India, which was Britain’s free market, it meant that the cost of living went up.

12.The Darlington Trust which funded Shantiniketan since 1921 was run by Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst. In December 1928, Lord Irwin had become the first viceroy to visit Shantiniketan. See Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore by Rabindranath Tagore, Krishna Dutt and Andrew Robinson.

13.Lieutenant Colonel Hassan Suhrawardy was a surgeon, the second Muslim from the subcontinent to become a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. He joined British service, lived an anglicized lifestyle but was being gradually drawn into revolutionary thought. His nephew Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, a member of the Congress Khilafat Swarajya Party and the future prime minister of Pakistan, and his daughter Shaista had already made a name for themselves for publicly speaking in favour of the revolutionaries. Lieutenant Colonel Suhrawardy did receive his knighthood the following year. The story of Parvati’s attempt on Sir Stanley Jackson’s life is documented in Rózsa Hajnóczy’s Fire of Bengal, pages 440 and 441. A similar incident repeated itself on the convocation day in 1932 in Colonel Suhrawardy’s presence. This time it was the professor of Bengali literature who had the honour of saving the governor.

14.A Chittagong undertrial, believed to be Ananta Lal Singh, had written to Gandhi-ji: ... you can certainly not deny the fact that in almost all the provinces the Congress programme has been worked out by men most of whom have violence as their policy at heart, and especially in Bengal, where the disobedience campaign has achieved the highest amount of success, ninety percent of the Congress workers are open revolutionaries to whom no doubt all the credit of the success goes ... Our lives are hanging on threads, thousands of

us are rotting in prisons, but to our utter surprise our cases have not even been mentioned once during the negotiations. Why then shall we stop our own proper fight which and which alone can bring us real freedom, which no amount of civil disobedience or boycott even continued for centuries will bring? We can only stop our fight and other violent programmes and are also ready to work out your programme which will no doubt carry much weight, if our prisoners who have been convicted of violent offences are at once released and all the death sentences commuted and the persons set at liberty and lastly all such trials withdrawn and the persons let off without delay. ... I request you to see the viceroy again with these demands, otherwise we have our own course and you along with your Working Committee have your own course; we run together for the same goal without having any obligations or responsibility to each other.

Gandhi-ji did not openly take up the demand for general amnesty, nor did he reply to the letter. Excerpts from the letter found its way into the police files, and Ananta Lal Singh believed that the central demand for the liberation of Bhagat Singh had been deliberately left out. Perhaps Gandhi-ji never received the letter, for the police had intercepted it or perhaps he had handed it over to the police himself. But Gandhi-ji did reply to Sukhdev's letter. See *Without Fear*, Kuldip Nayar.

But that Gandhi-ji had not completely ignored the request is documented in Lord Irwin's notes on the meeting of 19 March:

As he (Gandhi) was leaving, he asked if he might mention the case of Bhagat Singh, whose execution in March had been reported in the press. He said, this was an unfortunate day as it coincided with the arrival of the new President (of the Congress) in Karachi and there would be much popular excitement. I told him that I considered the case with most anxious care, but could find no grounds on which I could justify to my conscience commuting the sentence ... He appeared to appreciate the force of the argument and said no more. In his autobiography Fullness of Days, Lord Irwin writes: If the young man was hanged, said Gandhi, there was a likelihood that he would become a national martyr and the general atmosphere would be seriously prejudiced ... Gandhi said that he greatly feared, unless I could do something about it, that the effect would be to destroy our pact. I said that I should regret that no less than he, but it would be clear to him there were only three possible courses. The first was to do nothing and let the execution proceed, the second was to change the order and grant Bhagat Singh a reprieve, the third was to hold up any decision till

after the Congress meeting was over. I told him that I thought he would agree that it was impossible for me from my point of view to grant him his reprieve ...

The civil disobedience movement died out in 1934. The new constitutional reforms of 1935 blunted the edge of both the armed and unarmed struggle. In 1937, when the revolutionaries were no longer a threat, Mahatma Gandhi negotiated on their behalf with the provincial governments and succeeded in securing the release of the bulk of detainees and repatriation of convicted prisoners from the Andaman Cellular Jail to the mainland.

Mahatma Gandhi succeeded in bringing the timid masses to the forefront of the struggle but the revolutionary spirit animated them again and again. The short but intense nationwide upsurge during the Quit India movement in 1942 ‘was the product of an admixture of the revolutionary violence and a spirit of non-violent resistance inculcated by Gandhi’ (R.C. Majumdar, History of the Freedom Movement in India – Volume III, Calcutta 1977, p. 438). The formation of the INA, the mutiny of naval ratings in the Royal Indian Navy, the peasant revolts in the different parts of the country in the post-war years also contributed in forcing Britain – ravaged and weakened by the Second World War – to finally leave the shores of the jewel in her crown. No single leader or movement or ideology can take sole credit for gaining India her freedom. The might of the British Empire was eroded and whittled down through a long process of attrition in which both the charkha and the gun played their part. Do And Die, pp. 280 and 281, Manini Chatterjee.

15.J.M. Sengupta’s speech had found its way into the police files despite the fact that there was not one politically incorrect word in it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

1.On 1 May 1930, the viceroy, Lord Irwin, had promulgated an ordinance to set up a tribunal to try the Lahore Conspiracy Case which had been facing difficulties in the magistrate’s court. The tribunal had sentenced the three main accused to death on 7 October 1930.

Gandhi believed that the meek would inherit India. It was not possible for an

impoverished, subjugated and disarmed people to even attempt a violent struggle against the world's greatest imperial power. In 1921 when he first launched the civil disobedience movement, he wrote: Civil disobedience means our desire to surrender to a single unarmed policeman. Our triumph consists in thousands being led to the prisons like lambs to the slaughterhouse. If the lambs of the world had been willingly led, they would have long ago saved themselves from the butcher's knife. Three days after the hanging of Bhagat Singh, he repeated the sentiment: Whatever may be true of other countries, in this country which is teeming with famished millions, the cult of violence can have no meaning. In this country of self-suppression and timidity almost bordering on cowardice, we cannot have too much bravery, too much self-sacrifice. Do And Die, p. 280, Manini Chatterjee.

2. Seventeen-year-old Hans Raj Vohra, the king's witness, was in fact in London by then.

3. Version used in the display held at the Supreme Court, New Delhi, in December 2008 where the stones and sand, soaked in the blood of the martyrs were put on display. In Without Fear Kuldip Nayar says that the pyres were abandoned as the villagers rushed up and that the villagers completed the funeral rituals.

4. Without Fear, Kuldip Nayar, p. 173.

5. The Canberra Times, Friday, 27 March 1931, p. 1.

6. The Argus (Melbourne, Vic.), Monday, 30 March 1931.

7. Biplobi Mahanayak Surjya Sen O Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930–34, p. 113.

8. Younie Papers: Donovan's letter dated 19 April 1931.

9. The poor of Midnapore had quietly and defiantly taken to making their own salt. Peddie had ordered a few huts and grain stores to be torched. 'But this will incite them to violence,' a young ICS had warned. 'And then we will be able to crush it in a day,' had been Peddie's rejoinder.

10. The other was Jatijiban Ghose. This was the Bengal Volunteers taking revenge for the death sentence awarded to Dinesh Gupta for the Simpson murder.

CHAPTER NINE

1.The Canberra Times, 6 June 1931.

CHAPTER TEN

1.Farash is the Bengali word for French.

2.The sacrifice was made by Kanai Bhattacharya under orders from his mentor Satkori Bandopadhyay who was still in jail. The aim was to protect Bimal Dasgupta from the police. Youth vs Raj by Sona Roy.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1.Ananta Lal Singh describes the same word as ‘aijbor’.

2.Indian Army Reserve of Officers

3.Rabindranath Tagore, the poet and Nobel laureate, came from a wealthy zamindar family. Their lands too would come under periodical survey.

4.Haripada’s father survived. Rabindranath Tagore sent him Rs 200/- as aid and a few lines of poetry.

Hey kishore tuley lou tobo udar jaya bheri ... Oh, youth raise to your lips the trumpet of victory!

Haripada was not hanged as he was a juvenile. Of Rabindranath Tagore’s letter, Haripada Bhattacharya’s daughters remember this line in particular. Courtesy:

Debyani Sharma, Haripada Bhattacharya's granddaughter.

CHAPTER TWELVE

1.The Argus (Melbourne, Vic.), Thursday, 3 September 1931, p. 7.

2.J.M. Sengupta and his British wife, Nellie Sengupta, were prominent Congress workers dedicated to the freedom struggle. Mr Sengupta travelled to Britain and presented the story of the Chittagong riots before Prime Minister MacDonald and the House of Commons, evoking visions with the help of a magic lantern. Though he never identified himself with the armed struggle, he was arrested as soon as his ship docked at Bombay and held under the Bengal Regulation.

3.This is from Ananta Lal Singh's works. It has been adapted so that John Younie tells the story.

4.Do And Die, p. 195, Manini Chatterjee.

5.Chattogram Bidroher Kahini, Ananda Gupta.

6.Do And Die, p. 195, Manini Chatterjee.

7.What it meant for the Indian was that the promised return on the War Loan Stocks would diminish significantly as would all earnings and savings kept in the form of cash.

8.Mahanayak Surjya Sen Chattogram Biplob Pratham Khand, p. 62, Ananta Lal Singh.

9.Younie Papers, pp. 196 and 199.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. 'Murga', the Hindi word for a cock, is also used for the position assumed as a part of a punishment where the offender is forced down on his haunches, made to pass his arms from under his knees until the hands emerge between the knees and then made to hold his ears.

2. Younie Papers, p. 306.

3. Edward Villiers was the president of the European Association.

4. Renamed Netaji Subhash Road.

5. Lizards found on the inside walls of houses.

6. Commissioner Nelson's report was a confidential one. Perhaps John Younie did hear about it unofficially but he does not mention it in his letters. This account has been created for the sake of telling the story.

7. Later Lord Templewood.

8. The Second Round Table Conference had opened on 7 September 1931 in London. Gandhi had attended the Conference as the sole representative of the Congress. But the Conference had been deadlocked on the minorities issue, with separate electorate being demanded now not only by Muslims but also by the depressed classes which now also included the Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and Europeans.

9. This governor would certainly not have been able to work with Sir Charles Tegart.

10. The new commissioner of Chittagong. R.N. Reid was the Bengal chief secretary.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1. On 9 August 1925, the Hindustan Republican Army, which by now included Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, Sukhdev and Ram Prasad Bismil, looted a

train carrying government money. Ashfaqullah Khan, Ramprasad Bismil, Roshan Singh and Rajendra Lahiri were hanged. Sachin Sanyal and Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee were given life imprisonment. Azad and Kundan Lal Gupta succeeded in escaping. The HRA leadership suffered a big blow and the groups broke up into small units operating out of Kanpur, Lahore and Bengal.

In 1927 Sachin Sanyal's brother, Jatindranath Sanyal, revived the group with the help of Phanindra Nath Ghosh and Bhirendra Nath Bhattacharjee. Ghosh was behind the attempted assassination of Rai Bahadur J.N. Banerjee in Benares in 1928 and B.N. Bhattacharjee was the prime accused in the Deogarh Conspiracy Case.

In September 1928, Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev of the Lahore faction, Azad and Kundan Lal Gupta of the Kanpur faction met the Bengali faction led by Phanindra Nath Ghosh at Feroz Shah Kotla grounds in Delhi and the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) came into being. Azad was appointed as the commander-in-chief and Bhagat Singh placed in charge of ideology. The Philosophy of the Bomb written by Bhagawati Charan Vohra was adopted as the party manifesto. The first task was to avenge the death of Lala Lajpat Rai.

2.It must be kept in mind that during this period the British were wholly and solely in charge of India and had been so since 1803.

3.Barrister Pringle Kennedy (1855–1925) was born in India. He was a specialist in Mughal history and a holder of the Premchand Raichand fellowship of the University of Calcutta. During his years as member of the National Congress he advocated the creation of a national army for India. His publication Trihoot Courier promoted his liberal views. Widowed at the age of thirty-nine, he remarried in 1894 and settled in Muzzafarpur with his wife and little daughter Grace. It was around this time that he selected Joteen Mookerjee, from amongst a number of candidates, to be his secretary. He not only gave the young man his first job, he and his wife provided him with board and lodging upto 1899 and remained a mentor and guide until the time Joteen Mookerjee went underground.

4.From Notes on Outrages, Volume One, compiled in 1917 by Mr J.C. Nixon, ICS.

5.According to Prithwindra Mukherjee, Bagha Joteen was a founder member of Anushilan.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1. Kalpana Dutt and Kundaprabha.

2. Arrest of Gandhi

To preserve order

Government statement

Ideal of Congress

Impossible without violence

(British Official Wireless)

London Jan 4, Monday

The arrest of Gandhi on whose advice the Indian Congress has determined upon a renewal of the civil disobedience movement indicates that firm action is to be taken to preserve order in India. It is authoritatively stated that the government of India, with the full approval of His Majesty's government, will use all its statutory powers to control what is in effect a challenge to the government in carrying out its most elementary responsibility. The grounds for the action of the Congress apart from the Prime Minister's announcement at the Round Table Conference, which the Congress regards as wholly inadequate, but which was accepted by the Round Table Conference as ordinance which the government of India has put into force to cope with grave emergencies in three provinces.

3. The Canberra Times, Saturday, 23 January 1932, p. 1, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2264315>.

4. Mr Shooter's suicide strengthened the resolve not to punish the Chittagong

officers. The Intelligence Bureau chief, H. Williamson, wrote: When I was in Calcutta, I ascertained that it was an open secret that Mr Shooter knew that he was to be censured by the government. Unfortunately, the punishment which Mr Shooter knew he was to receive cannot be lessened or enhanced, for he is dead. May I be permitted to suggest that his very death seems to preclude any lessening or enhancement of the punishment proposed for the others?

Commissioner Nelson's report was never published and the Bengal government managed to evade the viceroy's Council's recommendation to compensate those who suffered a direct loss as a result of the excesses of government's officers.

5.It appears that Mr Wright committed suicide within a month.

6.Surendranath Banerjee, an ICS officer who was dismissed from service, founded the Indian Nation Association and later became a senior leader of the Indian National Congress. He was known as Rashtraguru or teacher of the nation; supported the Morley–Minto Reforms and criticized Gandhi's civil disobedience; was made a minister and was knighted in his later years. He was popularly referred to by the British as 'Surrender Not Banerjee'. He died in 1925 and is remembered as a pioneer leader of Indian politics.

7.The Argus (Melbourne, Vic.), Monday, 8 February 1932, p. 8, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.newsarticle4416273>.

8.Unlike Shanti and Suniti, who were able to practise firing in the wilds of Kumilla, Bina Das had never fired a revolver before. The weapon had been handed to her that morning and a hurried theoretical lesson had followed.

9.The same Kamala Dasgupta who had helped in the Dalhousie Square bombing episode.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1.The Argus (Melbourne, Vic.), Wednesday, 17 February 1932, p. 7, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.newsarticle4432291>.

2.Hanuman is the Indian langur monkey. The monkey god assisted Lord Ram in his battle against Ravan, the demon king of Lanka (today Sri Lanka), during the epic age of the Ramayana.

3.The description has been taken from Ananta Lal Singh's Yuva-Vidroha Part I. John Younie records, in his letter dated 6.3.32: On Tuesday (the first inst) we delivered judgement at the jail. The whole proceedings only lasted about ten minutes as I read out only the sentences and not the whole of the 434 type written pages which represented February's 29 days of drudgery. While the prisoners were engaged in shouting Banda mataran (sic) we took our departure. Within two hours the prisoners were all barred and fettered and removed by bus to a waiting steamer. And before they or their friends and admirers in Chittagong knew where they were they were steaming down the Karnafuli with Hicks in charge. So there were no farewell demonstrations whatsoever. Hands and Gordon, the D.I.G., had made all their arrangements extremely and thoroughly and everything went without a hitch.

4.This was the loophole in the prosecution's case that Mr Younie had made use of. Had the accused been charged under Sections 121A and 120 B of the Indian Penal Code as Bhagat Singh had been, the maximum punishment could have been transportation for life; transportation for life or death respectively. He further argued that the criminality of the conspiracy was distinct from and independent of the criminality of overt acts. And no specific charges of criminal acts had been made by the prosecution. The punishments awarded were the maximum provided for the offence of conspiracy to wage war against the king.

5.The government moved the capital from Delhi to Simla every year during the summer.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

1.V.W.F. Hicks became superintendent of police in Chittagong around this time. It is he who petitioned the courts in the Supplementary Armoury Raid Case trial, Mahanayak Surjya Sen Chattogram Biplob Pratham Khand, Ananta Lal Singh, p. 180. It appears, indirectly, from newspaper reports that Mr Wright, who succeeded Mr Johnson as superintendent of police in November 1931,

committed suicide within three months of taking over:

POLICE CHIEF'S SUICIDE

CALCUTTA, February 3.

The suicide of the superintendent of police at Chittagong two years ago, following a nervous breakdown, was recalled to-day by the discovery by his wife of the body of Frederick Prior, superintendent of police at Dacca. A revolver was beside the body. Prior was aged 36 years, and had been in the Bengal police for 11 years, and at Dacca for two years. He was subject to a terrific strain as a result of the terrorist activities. At the inquest a verdict of suicide was returned.

This news clipping was published in The Courier Mail (Brisbane, Qld.: 1933–1954), Monday, 5 February 1934, p. 13. The Chittagong police chief would have committed suicide in around February 1932. The special superintendent and jail super mentioned by Ananta Lal Singh is a W.B. or W.D. Hicks and may quite possibly be the same man who took over after Wright's suicide. The incident, however, has not found a mention in John Younie's letters.

2.The Diaries of Captain Malcolm Duncan Kennedy, entry dated 9 August 1930.

3.The Diaries of Captain Malcolm Duncan Kennedy.

4.The sequence of events and the conversations are from the diary of Pritilata Waddadar as quoted in Chattogram Astragar Loonthon, Charu Bikash Dutt.

5.Kalpana Dutt's code name.

6.In the battle of Mahabharata Arjun's son, Abhimanyu, had given his life penetrating the enemy's formation but had succeeded in leading his army in and had as a result changed the course of the war.

7. One of the girls was later identified as Pritilata Waddadar.
8. Written by Ganesh Ghosh while in Chittagong Jail. The handwritings had been identified later by the police.
9. On 22 June, Sub-inspector Sailendra Sengupta and Additional Superintendent Strelly discovered a bundle of papers tied up in a towel lying at the bottom of a drain. They contained information as to how the revolutionaries were continuing with their political agenda in the face of adversity. Amongst the papers was an exercise book with essays in English on the Dynamite Conspiracy Case and the exploits of Ananta Lal Singh; a second exercise book with the details of the achievements of the Chittagong group; a copy of the statement of Bina Das; an explanation of the Soviet system; an article on the real meaning of purna swaraj, a newspaper cutting on THE SHIFTING IRISH LEADERSHIP; an account by Pritilata Waddadar of her meetings in jail with Ram Krishna Biswas; a collection of poems including one entitled JALALABAD and a few copies of the Swadhinata.
10. These powers were granted under Rule 11 of the Bengal Suppression of Terrorists Outrages Act, 1932.
11. New brother.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

1. A few days later the police had returned to confiscate a handwritten book of songs to compare with one of the handwritings found in Dhalghat.
2. Deben De who had taken part with Gopi Nath Saha, Ananta and Julu-da in the failed attempt on Tegart's life.
3. Pritilata's father's deposition, Mahanayak Surjya Sen Chattogram Biplob Pratham Khand, Ananta Lal Singh, p. 168.
4. Mahanayak Surjya Sen Chattogram Biplob Pratham Khand, Ananta Lal Singh, p. 166.

Inspector Jogendra Gupta died of tuberculosis and that Savitri Mashima prayed for his death, for he ill-treated political prisoners, Chittagong Armoury Raiders – Reminiscences, Kalpana Dutt, p. 36.

5.The credit belonged to Sailesh Ray, a new member of the Chittagong group. He was guided by Binod Bihari Dutt, who had set up the Kumilla centre with the help of Haralal Choudhury.

6.The Argus (Melbourne, Vic.), Saturday, 6 August 1932, p. 21, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.newsarticle4467029>. Atul Sen took cyanide and died. A second attempt was made on 28 September 1932. Mr Watson escaped with minor injuries but Anil Bhaduri and Mani Lahiri were gunned down. Mr Watson decided to return to England. On 18 November 1932, the Rajshahi Jail superintendent, Mr Charles Luke, escaped an attempt on his life and Bholanath Karmakar was sentenced to seven years in prison.

7.The Canberra Times, Monday, 8 August 1932, p. 1, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2296214>.

8.Master-da had been waiting with Pritilata at Ramani Chakravarti's house – the Kountala Shelter. Biplobi Mahanayak Surjya Sen O Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930– 34.

9.Biplobi Mahanayak Surjya Sen O Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930–34, p. 81.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

1.The date of transfer to Andamans is unconfirmed. Mallikarjuna Sharma interviewed Sahayram Das and Subodh Roy who remembered the date as middle of July 1932 and 15 August 1932 respectively. In Retrospect, Volume 3: East India, Part II: Bengal, Assam and Orissa, [Sagas of heroism and sacrifice of Indian Revolutionaries], Mallikarjuna Sharma, pp. 27 and 75.

2.In the earlier part of 1923 he had successfully defended Santoshda in the Second Alipore Conspiracy Case.

3. British Burdwan.

4. Mir Jafar had conspired with Robert Clive to overthrow his grandnephew Siraj-ud-daula, let him down at the Battle of Plassey in 1757, took over the throne of Bengal and signed a treaty with the British granting them several important privileges. By 1764, the British had got rid of the Indian princes and after the Battle of Buxar, became the masters of Bengal.

5. Four paisas made an anna and there were sixteen annas to a rupee.

6. Now renamed Mirza Ghalib Street.

CHAPTER TWENTY

1. The Canberra Times, Wednesday, 14 September 1932, p. 1, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.newsarticle2304317>.

2. Based on Snehalata's testimony, three youths from the villages had been charged with providing shelter and support to the absconders. These were Dinesh Dasgupta, Ajit Biswas and Manindra De. They all received four years of rigorous imprisonment.

3. Kalpana Dutt's code name.

4. This popularly held British view is reflected in The Diaries of Captain Malcolm Duncan Kennedy and in the report made to the army chief by the brigadier commanding the Presidency and Assam district.

5. The chief secretary of Bengal in his fortnightly report to London wrote: Pritilata had been closely associated with, if not actually the mistress of, the terrorist Ram Krishna Biswas who was hanged for the murder of Inspector Tarini Mukherji, and some reports indicate that she was the wife of Nirmal Sen who was killed while attempting to evade arrest at Dhalghat, where Captain Cameron fell.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

1.The Argus (Melbourne, Vic.), Tuesday, 27 September 1932, p. 7, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.newsarticle4500291>.

2.Mistakenly says Monday. It has been corrected to Saturday, 24 September which is the accepted date.

3.The Argus (Melbourne, Vic.), Wednesday, 28 September 1932, p. 7, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.newsarticle4500294>.

4.The Canberra Times, Saturday, 1 October 1932, p. 1, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2307899>.

5.The letter had been sent by a Chittagong revolutionary believed to be Ananta Lal Singh, who was then in jail, to Mr Gandhi. The central demand for the release of Bhagat Singh seemed to have been deliberately left out in the extracts preserved in the police files. Do And Die, Manini Chatterjee.

6.A meeting was held on 5 December, where the mayor of Calcutta Corporation said that the accusation was a deliberate lie and a calumny. The storm aroused by the speech threatened to rage for some weeks and then the storm subsided as suddenly as it arose with no legal action taking place.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

1.The Argus (Melbourne, Vic.), Tuesday, 29 November 1932, p. 7, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article4511412>.

2.Commissioner Reid who had joined in December 1931 has been replaced by A.J. Dash.

3.Bijoya or Vijaya is the Bengali word for victory. It is the day when Lord Ram was victorious over the demon king, Ravan, of Lanka and coincides with the end

of Durga Puja. The image of the mother goddess is immersed in the river, signifying her return to her heavenly abode.

4.The other favourite that Kalpana sang for him was Probhu darao tomaye dekhi ... Wait my Lord, let me take a look at you.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

1.These had been sent to the inspector of explosives who reported that they were so dangerous that they could not be sent back to Chittagong. Report on operation by District Magistrate A.S. Hands. Do And Die, p. 231, Manini Chatterjee.

2.Do And Die, Manini Chatterjee.

3.On 30 April 1932, Prodyot Bhattacharya and Pravangshu Pal shot dead District Magistrate Douglas of Midnapore and escaped. Youth vs Raj, Sona Roy.

4.From Alipur New Central Jail in Calcutta, Ambika Charan Chakraborty appealed to the high court and his sentence was commuted to transportation for life. He was sent to the Andamans Cellular Jail.

5.This sentence had been quoted by Kalpana's defence lawyers who tried to use it to prove that even Master-da recognized the fact that she was not a serious revolutionary. The judges did not agree with the translation, saying it was clear that Surjya Sen did not approve of romantic liaisons between revolutionaries and that it had no bearing on whether she was a good or a serious revolutionary.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

1.Of this, Rs 28,000/- was distributed amongst those that had suffered due to the raids. Do And Die, p. 228, Manini Chatterjee.

2.Monoranjan Dasgupta.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

1.Master-da's unfinished autobiography was seized by the police. Only bits were retrieved.

2.All three accused appealed against the verdict to the high court. DIG Mr Gordon wrote an anxious note to his superiors: It is to be hoped that the Crown will succeed in convincing the High Court of the necessity of maintaining these sentences. The commutation of the sentence of Ambika Chakraborty was most unfortunate and the case put forward by the Crown Council was very feeble.

The appeals were heard by a three-judge bench of the high court comprising H.R. Pankridge, Torrick Ameer Ali and M.C. Ghose. The verdict, delivered on 14 November 1933, upheld the sentence of death on Surjya Sen and Tarakeshwar Dastidar and transportation for life for Kalpana Dutt. She was removed to Rajshahi Jail in north Bengal while Master-da and Tarakeshwar were confined to the death row in Chittagong Jail. Do And Die, p. 259, Manini Chatterjee.

3.Misprint. Should be Tarini Mukherji who was shot by Ram Krishna Biswas.

4.The Courier-Mail, Wednesday, 15 November 1933, p. 13, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1141244>.

5.The Courier-Mail, Brisbane, Monday, 20 November 1933, p. 15. National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.newsarticle1142664>.

6.The Courier-Mail, Brisbane, Saturday, 16 December 1933, p. 15.

7.The Courier-Mail, Brisbane, Saturday, 16 December 1933, p. 13. Amongst these were Shanti Chakraborty, Mani Dutt, Kali Kinkar De and Mahendra Choudhury. Binod Bihari Dutt continued as president of the IRA after Tarakeshwar Dastidar's arrest.

8.The Courier-Mail, Brisbane, Friday, 29 December 1933, p. 10, National

Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.newsarticle1155195>.

9. Ananta Lal Singh calls him Sukhendu Das but clarifies that he was caught along with Tarakeshwar.

10. The Bengal Volunteers groups had sworn that the chair of district magistrate of Medinipur would remain vacant. After the murders of Peddie and Douglas, no young white man would volunteer to come down to Medinipur. At last, Mr Barge had accepted the post. On 2 September 1933, the Police Grounds hosted the football match between the Mohammedan Club and the Town Club. BV's Anath Panja and Mrigen Dutt took position and fired. As the people around fled, Anath sat on Barge's chest and fired the three remaining bullets into him. Then the police opened fire and the two volunteers rolled over without a care in the world. Midnapore should be taught a lesson became the cry of the white people and indiscriminate arrests began. Three persons who carried no firearms on their persons were arrested later that day – Nirmal Ghose, Ram Krishna Roy and Brojokishore Chakraborty – and sentenced to be hanged on October 1934. Four others were given life imprisonment and another four acquitted but rearrested under the Bengal Ordinance. Crown Approver Sailesh Chandra Ghose was acquitted and sent to England at Government expense.

11. The Courier-Mail, Tuesday, 9 January 1934, p. 11, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1158371>.

12. The Courier-Mail, Wednesday, 10 January 1934, p. 12, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1158805>.

13. The assailant was Kiran Sen who lived in the next village. He had braved the curfew hours and with Khoka Nandi had waited in the dark behind the zamindar's kitchen. A da, used for splitting coconuts, had been used to behead the traitor. Neither the weapon nor the boys were ever discovered and the British did not look too hard. It wasn't until independence that their identities were revealed. The IRA youngsters had carried out Binod Bihari Dutt's last command.

14. The Courier-Mail, Thursday, 11 January 1934, p. 11, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1159241>.

15. Emperor vs Surjya Kumar Sen and Anr. on 14 November, 1933 Equivalent citations: AIR 1934 Cal 221, 147 Ind Case 32 JUDGMENT

1.The appellants before us were tried by Commissioners appointed under the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1925. They were all charged with conspiracy to wage war against the King (Section 121-A, I. P. C.) and with waging or abetting the waging of such war (Section 121, I. P. C.) The appellant Sen was further charged with the murder of Capt. Cameron at Dalghat on 13th June 1932, and with the abetment of the murder of Mrs. Sullivan at Pahartali on 24th September 1932. The appellant Dastidar and the female appellant were charged with the attempted murder at Gahira on 19th May 1933, with the unlawful possession of explosives [Section 4(b). The Explosive Substances Act, 1908] and with the unlawful possession of arms and ammunition on the same date and at the same place [Section 19(f), Indian Arms Act 1878]. There is a further charge against the appellant Dastidar of attempting to murder Assistant Sub-Inspector Sasanko Bhattacharji on 6th March 1931.

2.The trial began on 15th June 1933. The Commissioners examined 170 witnesses, and in the course of the proceedings 346 documentary and material exhibits were tendered. The Commissioners delivered their judgment on 14th August 1933, convicting the appellants on all charges framed against them with the exception of the charge of attempted murder at Gahira of which the appellant Dastidar and the female appellant were found not guilty and acquitted. They sentenced the male appellants to death under Section 121, I. P. C, and the female appellant to transportation for life under the same section. They passed no separate sentences in respect of the other offences of which the appellants were convicted.

3.The only objection taken before the Commissioners as to the form and conduct of the trial was with reference to the charge under Section 4(b), Explosive Substances Act. The Commissioners overruled this objection, and when Mr. Basu for the appellant Dastidar was taking the point before us, the learned Advocate-General for the Crown stated that, inasmuch as no sentence had been passed under that section, he would have no objection if, in order to save the time of the Court, the convictions of the appellant Dastidar and the female appellant under it were set aside, and we thereupon decided to accept this suggestion. We have now to deal with the convictions under the other sections, against all of which the appellants have appealed. In addition, as the male appellants have been sentenced to death, the propriety of their conviction under Section 121, I. P. C, and of the sentences imposed upon them has to be considered by us under Ch. 27, Criminal P. C. The Commissioners have given a detailed account of the events at Chittagong during, the period beginning with

the preparations for the Armoury Raid of 18th April 1930 and ending with the arrest of the appellants Tarakeshwar Dastidar and Kalpana Dutt on 19th May 1933.

4. There is no need for us to recapitulate this account, for much of it is common ground, since counsel appearing for the appellants have generally speaking not sought to question the events themselves, but have argued that the connexion of their clients with them has not been established. We will deal first with the case of the appellant senior. Mr. Chatterjee, if he will permit us to say so, showed very great wisdom in abstaining from putting his client's case too high. He did not dispute the fact that the appellant was arrested at Gairala on 16th February 1933 and that being then in unlawful possession of a revolver and ammunition, he was guilty under the Arms Act. He further stated that documents found upon his person at the time of his arrest showed that he had been on terms of close association with one Pritilata Waddadar. This person is a girl of about 20 years of age, who admittedly took a leading part in the attack on the Pahartali Railway Institute on 24th September 1932, and whose dead body was afterwards found in the vicinity of the Institute. A post mortem examination showed the cause of her death to be poisoning by cyanide of potassium presumably self administered. Mr. Chatterjee also conceded that the watchers' reports established that the appellant had for some months prior to the Armoury Raid been constantly associating with persons, some of whom have since been killed in conflict with the forces of the Crown, while others have been convicted of waging war against the King. Finally he did not dispute the fact that the revolver found on the appellant was one of those stolen in the Armoury Raid. He indicated that in view of these circumstances he did not feel justified in submitting that the Commissioners were wrong in convicting his client of conspiracy to wage war under Section 121-A, but at the same time he maintained that the evidence did not show that the appellant was guilty of any of the acts of war alleged against him.

5. We will first deal with the appellant's alleged connexion with the Armoury Raid. It is pointed out that, although the appellant was under police observation, there is no evidence at all that he was in Chittagong on 17th April. With regard to 18th April Mr. Chatterjee says that the language of the watcher's report (Ex. 124/31) suggests that the presence of the appellant on that date was a matter of inference rather than of direct observation. He also criticises Ex. 112, the personal diary of a police officer named Ramani Mohan Mujumdar, P. W. 64, on which the Commissioners have relied. In dealing with the case of the appellant

Dastidar, we shall give our reasons for holding that this is a document which should be regarded with considerable suspicion. However, even if we eliminate the direct oral evidence of the appellant's presence in Chittagong after 16th April, we consider that his actual participation in the Armoury Raid is established beyond all doubt. That he was deeply involved in the conspiracy is scarcely disputed and it is hardly conceivable that he should have been absent when the active campaign was launched. Moreover no suggestion has been made as to where he was, if not at Chittagong, nor has any reason been assigned for his leaving the town. The evidence however of his presence goes far beyond these general considerations of probability. For reasons which we shall give shortly, we are in entire agreement with the finding of the Commissioners that among the conspirators the appellant passed by the name of "Masterda." In the so-called mobilization lists (Ex. 91) found at the search of the house of Ganesh Ghosh the conspirator on the morning of 19th April 1930, Masterda is shown as in charge of the largest group of raiders. The matter is finally concluded by the statement of the appellant himself in Ex. 199, a document which the Commissioners have in our opinion rightly held to be in the handwriting of the appellant senior. The material passage is as follows:

After the Puja Vacation myself and my coworkers at Chittagong were so much engrossed in the arrangement for action that we all cleanly forgot about Rani. After an extensive preparation for six months the Chittagong revolution manifested itself on the night of 18th April 1930. Every leader joined it. On 22nd April there was a fight for about two and a half hour with the British soldiers at Jalalabad Hills, and the British Army was vanquished at last. We sustained 12 casualties in that hand to hand fight. After the Jalalabad fight we came down from the hills and concealed ourselves.

6. Our conclusion is that the appellant took a leading part in the raid and his conduct amounted to waging war against the King. It will be here convenient to deal with the evidence proving that when Masterda is mentioned in documents written by members of the conspiracy, the appellant is meant. There is firstly direct oral evidence that the appellant was called Masterda by his friends. Perhaps if this was all, the fact could not be held to be satisfactorily established, although not a suggestion has been hazarded before us as to who Masterda can

be if not the appellant, in spite of the fact that Masterda is unquestionably an important, if not the most important, member of the conspiracy. What puts the matter beyond the region of conjecture is Ex. 199, where the appellant speaking of his introduction to Pritilata writes:

When Rani came home during the Puja. Vacation in 1931 she saw Anita. This time she had come with a firm determination that she would tell everything fully to Anita and try to meet me (Masterda).

7. In view of these facts no importance can be attached to the absence of the name "Masterda" in the admitted letters in the handwriting of Pritilata found on the person of the appellant at the time of his arrest in which the writer addresses him not as "Masterda" but as "Dada." We have referred to Ex. 199, which is said to have been found at Gairala at the time of the appellant's apprehension, tied up with other documents in a bundle in a ditch. An analysis of these documents is to be found in the Commissioner's judgment at p. 247 of the paper book. We are however at the moment concerned with the circumstances in which these documents were found and the question of their authenticity. It is not apparent that any very vigorous attack was made on the bonafides of the search before the Commissioners. Be that as it may, the point has been pressed before us.

8. It is pointed out that the Havildar, P. W. 103, states that at sunrise after the arrest of the appellant he noticed a small tank, from which one of his men recovered a dhoti and a sari. He adds: 'We did not find anything else then. We searched and did not find anything more.' The Sub-Inspector of Police accompanying the party states that he found the bundle of papers tied up in a towel on clearing hyacinth from a ditch. The search witness P. W. 111, who describes himself as a zemindar, identifies the bundle in question as found in a ditch. He also says in cross-examination that he was present when things were found "in the tank on the first day." To the Court he stated that the ditch was about 50 cubits from the tank to the west.

He adds: I am sure the things found on the first day were found in the ditch. Chemise, cloth, pair of white canvas shoes, were found in the ditch on the first day.

9. The search list is Ex. 187. Counsel has drawn our attention to the fact that items 37 and 38 appear to be the garments found by the Havildar, and they are described as recovered from the water of a ditch on the north-west corner of the

tank” a description substantially the same as that given of the place where the bundle of papers was found. The argument is that the police claim to have found the bundle in a place already searched by the Havildar without any bundle being found. Therefore the bundle was put there after the Havildar’s search. Therefore it was put there by the police. We do not find it possible to accept this contention. The confusion between “tank” and “ditch” is easy enough, and having regard to the evidence of the search witness it appears to us that the place, where he saw the bundle recovered, is at some distance from the place where the Havildar recovered the clothes.

10. We may add that, if there is any inconsistency, it is only of importance if it is serious enough to raise a reasonable suspicion, that the Police Officer accompanying the military party had provided himself with a bundle of forged and incriminating documents for the purpose of “planting” it on the appellant. In our opinion there is nothing to justify such a suspicion. Once the Court is satisfied of the bonafides of the discovery of the bundle, there is no reason to entertain suspicions as to the authenticity of its contents. Apart from this consideration however it has in our opinion been clearly demonstrated that the documents alleged by the prosecution to be in the appellant’s handwriting are in fact in his handwriting. They have been submitted to Mr. Bennett, P. W. 170, the handwriting expert who, after comparing them with the admitted handwriting of the appellant, gives as his opinion that they were written by him. Our attention has not been drawn to any passages in this witness’s cross-examination which discredit his testimony. Mr. Bennett’s evidence is corroborated by that of Umesh Chandra De, P. W. 129, who is acquainted with the appellant’s handwriting and has seen him write both in English and Bengali.

11. Finally we have ourselves examined considerable portions of the documents in both scripts, and we entertain no doubt that the Commissioners were right in coming to the conclusion that the documents are genuine. We will now deal with the Pahartali raid of 24th September 1932, in the course of which several persons were injured and Mrs. Sullivan, a lady of 60 years of age, was murdered. Counsel has found it impossible to argue that his client was not connected with it. On Pritilata’s dead body was found a document Ex. 56, which, it is not disputed, is in her handwriting. In it she states that she was summoned by “Masterda” to join in the raid, but that, when asked to lead it, she felt diffident on account of her sex. But “Masterda soon convinced me and I took my leader’s command.” The appellant’s own version of his connexion with the Pahartali outrage is to be found in Ex. 189 which was found at Gairala, and has been

satisfactorily proved to be in his handwriting. It is headed “Bejoya,” and it was clearly written on the Bejoya day at the end of September 1932. After referring to other revolutionaries, who have been killed or convicted, he writes of Pritilata as follows:

To-day I remember more that emblem shed, pure and beautiful, whom I immersed fifteen days ago, putting weapon in her one hand and nectar in the other. The remembrance of her is predominant today. I have not been able to forget her remembrance even for a moment during these fifteen days, whom I sent to the field of battle dressing her up with my own hands in battle attire whom I permitted to jump into the sure jaws of death. When I told her piteously after I had dressed her up that I had dressed her for the last time and her dada would never in his life dress her again the idol smiled a little.

12. It is admitted that the reference is to Priti, the “nectar” can only mean the poison, and “battle attire,” the male dress she was wearing at the time of her death. All who joined in the raid or personally directed it were in our opinion guilty of the murder of Mrs. Sullivan. Any person who instigated a raider or leader of the raid is therefore guilty of abetment of murder. Accordingly the appellant was rightly convicted of that offence under Sections 302/109, I.P.C. It was suggested before the Commissioners that the Pahartali raid was not waging war, because only one of the persons playing whist in the Institute was an official. The same argument was hinted at here and quickly abandoned. No contention could be more ludicrous. The Institute was attacked because the persons using it were Europeans and Anglo-Indians, who might be expected to be supporters of ‘the Government. The conspirators’ own statements make this plain. Priti writes in Ex. 56 that the revolutionaries have ‘been compelled to take up arms against the lives of any and every member of the British community, official or non-official.

13. That such had been the policy of the conspirators from the outset is established by leaflets found after the Armoury Raid. Ex. 51 is one of such leaflets. It concludes as follows:

The Indian Republican Army further declares that any person who will be able to produce any Englishman, woman or child of any age to its headquarters, dead or alive, will be amply rewarded.

By Order

President in Council,

Indian Republican Army

Chittagong Branch.

14. With regard to the case of this appellant it only remains to consider whether the Commissioners were right in finding him guilty of the murder of Capt. Cameron at Dhalghat on 13th June 1932. The case for the prosecution is that both Priti and the appellant were in the house at Dhalghat, in company with Nirmal Sen and Apurba Sen, who were killed by rifle fire on that occasion. It is said that when the shots were fired from the upper room which killed Capt. Cameron, who was about to enter it, the appellant was inside with Nirmal and 1934 C/29 & 30 Apurba, Priti being downstairs. The direct evidence on the point is that of P. W. 26, a girl Snehalata Debi, described as about 14 years old, the daughter of the woman to whom the house belonged. It is undisputed that on the first occasion on which she gave an account of the incident before any Court, she mentioned the appellant "Masterda" and identified him by means of a photograph. Her veracity is however attacked because her deposition on that occasion (Ex. 333) contains no reference to the presence of any woman. She admits that she made no mention of Priti before the Magistrate, and gives "lojja," or delicacy, as the reason of her silence. We agree with the Commissioners that this fact, coupled with the tender years of the witness, would, as a matter of prudence, prevent the Court from acting on her evidence, if it were unsupported by material corroboration. We are not troubled by the minor discrepancies in her story. They are only to be expected in view of her age, and in view of the fact that before the Commissioners she was describing an event that had happened a little more than 12 months previously. One piece of corroboration on which reliance is placed by the Crown is Ex. 257.

15. This document was discovered on the person of a boy named Anil Dutt, who was arrested on 4th March 1933 at a village named Vidagram for disobeying the Curfew regulations. It is useless to speculate from whom he had obtained it or what he intended to do with it. The fact remains that it has in our opinion been satisfactorily proved to be in the handwriting of the appellant by the witnesses,

Bennett and De, to whom reference has already been made. It purports to be the copy of a record made by Priti of her introduction to Nirmal Sen and subsequently to the appellant and their actions thereafter. We know from Ex. 199 that Priti had put it on record in writing that when meeting the appellant for the first time she felt that she was going to see her god. This very language is used of the first meeting with "Masterda" in Ex. 257. We consider it a fair inference that this exhibit is a copy of the writing by Priti to which reference is made in Ex. 199. As regards the particular incident we are now considering a detailed account of it and the events leading up to it is given in the document, corresponding in all material particulars with the story told by P. W. 26 before the Commissioners,' and, as far as the appellant is concerned, with her story before the Special Magistrate; It is not unlikely that questions put to the girl in the course of the investigation, by some one with Ex. 257 at his disposal, have had the effect of making her think she has a clear recollection of details than at this distance of time she possesses.

16. But the points with regard to which this may have occurred are of no material importance, since as to the part played by the appellant her story has through Out remained substantially the same A special value attaches to Priti's account, of which Ex. 257 is a copy, from the fact that the handwriting of the exhibit is the appellant's who may therefore in the circumstances fairly be considered to have adopted the story set out in the original, at any rate, in so far as it relates to himself. Priti's presence at Dhalghat is also established by certain documents found there by a European and an Indian police officer on 22nd June 1932. Among them we need only mention Exs. 178 and 179. It has not been denied that these are letters written by Ram Krishna Biswas to Priti in July 1931. Ram Krishna was then a prisoner in Alipur Jail, having been sentenced to death for the murder of Inspector Tarini Charan Mukerji at Chandpur on 1st December 1930. Priti's statement in Ex. 56 is that while Ram Krishna was awaiting execution in the jail she visited him 40 times. The jail registers corroborate this, and also prove that he did in fact write and despatch the two letters found at Dhalghat. As Priti is proved by the documents in the case to have entertained the highest regard for Ram Krishna, the finding of these letters shows that Priti had been at Dhalghat and had been compelled to leave them there in haste.

17. In our opinion the Commissioners were right in holding that the appellant was at Dhalghat on 13th June 1932, that he was an occupant of the upstairs room when the shots which killed Capt. Cameron were fired, that those shots were fired in pursuance of the common intention of all the Occupants, and that by the

application of Section 34, I. P. C.; the appellant was, guilty of murder. We have now dealt with the case of the appellant Sen and must consider that of the appellant Dastidar. As regards his alleged connection with the conspiracy, the evidence is that in December 1928 he attended the Calcutta Congress in the company of other conspirators, and that in September of the following year he took a prominent part in the celebrations in honour of Jotin Das, the hunger striker. In the early part of 1930, the watchers reports prove his association with the conspirators, but it has very properly been pointed out that the last mention of him in these reports is on 20th March 1930. Subsequent to that the only evidence of his presence in Chittagong is that of P. W. 64, who proves his presence there on the afternoon of 18th April. In support of his oral testimony he produces his personal diary, Ex. 112. As we do not propose to rely on it, it will be sufficient to say that its language is consistent with the contents-being the result of information and not of observation. Further we cannot exclude the possibility that the entry was made after the Armoury Raid, and the names appearing there are those of the persons who, in the opinion of the writer, were the most likely to be concerned in it.

18.To sum up, we are not satisfied that the appellant was in Chittagong at the time of the raid or indeed after 20th March. It has perhaps some significance that the only positive defence put forward by any of the accused in this case on any of the charges is this appellant's defence of alibi in respect of the Raid. He states that on 18th April he was at Rajshahi attending a conference. There is no evidence in support of this alibi, which was put forward when the appellant was examined under Section 342, Criminal P. C, but we need not consider it critically, as the learned Advocate General admitted in the course of argument that he had not been able to establish affirmatively that the appellant was in Chittagong at or about the time of the Raid. The prosecution place considerable reliance on the association of the appellant with Ram Krishna-Biswas, of whom mention has been made, and they prove that in) March 1930 when Ram Krishna was suffering from injuries received in a very suspicious accidental explosion, the appellant was concerning himself with the management of his (Ram Krishna's) private affairs.

19.Another piece of evidence used to establish the appellant's connexion with the conspiracy is a document (Ex. 105) written by Prithi and found at Dalghat. In it, describing her conversations with Ram Krishna in jail, she says that he told her that among his revolutionary friends was one Futyada, whom he held in high regard, and who had recruited him and to whom he was accustomed to turn for

guidance. It is now denied that “Futu” was the name by which the appellant was known to his intimates, and the small difference in form between “Futu” and “Futya” does not in our opinion affect the matter. It appears that there is a Kaviraj, who comes from the same village as the appellant and Ram Krishna, called Futya, but there is no reason to suppose that he had anything to do with the conspiracy. For reasons that we are about to give, we think the document admissible in evidence and we also think that the Futuda referred to, in it is the appellant Dastidar. At the same time having regard to the fact that it is the report of the conversation of a third person, we do not attach great evidentiary value to it, and expunging it from the record would make no difference to our finding that the appellant has been shown to be a member of the conspiracy. On the question of the admissibility of the document the opinion we have formed is as follows:

20. We consider the reference by Ram Krishna to Futu admissible under Section 10, Evidence Act, for the following reasons: Such statement, if proved, is in itself a relevant fact by virtue of Section 10, Evidence Act. The statement by Pritilata is again a relevant fact under Section 10, Evidence Act, as against Ram Krishna Biswas (and other conspirators). The statement by Pritilata has been proved. Hence the statement by Pritilata is evidence against all the conspirators including Tarakeshwar Dastidar, to the effect that Ram Krishna Biswas made his statement concerning Tarakeshwar Dastidar. The statement concerning Tarakeshwar Dastidar is therefore in our opinion proved.

21. On the question of the appellant’s connexion with the conspiracy, it must always be remembered that his former associations with proved conspirators must be construed in the light of his subsequent actions. He disappeared after the raid, and all we know of his movements since that time is that he participated in acts of violence. At the time of his apprehension he was, as we shall show, the directing mind of the conspiracy, and was considering the possibility of committing further outrages.

22. We may also refer to Ex. 186 found on the person of the appellant Sen at the time of his arrest. We have no doubt that the Futu there referred to is the appellant Dastidar; if so, association between the two appellants is established. The conclusion we have arrived at is that in all probability he was in the conspiracy from the start. If however this is open to reasonable doubt, it is beyond question that immediately after the Armoury Raid he threw in his lot with his former associates, and was an active member of the conspiracy, and a rebel in arms against the Crown up to the moment of his arrest at Gahira on 19th

May 1933.

23. We can deal very briefly with the conviction of this appellant for the attempted murder of Sub-Inspector Bhattacharya (P. W. 72) at Barama on 16th March 1931. It is not now contended that the witness is not stating what he believes to be the truth, when he says that as he was pursuing the appellant, the latter fired a revolver and hit him in the chest. Neither is it contended that the appellant was not present in the company of another armed man, when the Sub-Inspector in broad daylight met with his injuries. What is suggested is that as the Sub-Inspector knew the identity of the appellant, but did not know the identity of his companion, it is possible that a process of what the Commissioners describe as “autosuggestion” has induced him to attribute to the appellant injuries in fact inflicted by the appellant’s companion. We see no ground to suppose that anything of the sort has happened, and we are prepared to accept the evidence of the Sub-Inspector as not only honest but accurate. That being so the appellant has been rightly convicted of attempted murder under Section 307, I. P. C.

24. We may here say that the Commissioners have held that the appellant’s conduct at Barama, although it amounted to an offence under this section, was not an act of waging war, inasmuch as the appellant’s primary motive for attempting to murder the police officer was the desire to escape apprehension, and not the desire to weaken the forces of the Government. The appellant’s counsel has argued in support of that view, and has pointed out that by similar reasoning opening fire at Gahira should be held not to amount to waging war, because the Commissioners have held that the common intention of those who fired may have been to drive away the forces of the Crown and escape, and therefore they have declined to convict under Section 307 in respect of that occasion.

25. We need not stop to consider whether the one finding would follow logically from the other; for in our opinion both acts were overt acts of waging war. We concede that it is possible to imagine a case where, after the conspiracy has been abandoned as failure, attempts to arrest former conspirators are made and forcibly resisted. It may be correct; we do not say that it is correct, that such resistance does not amount to waging war, as the intention to wage war is no longer entertained. Such however was not the situation either at Barama or Gahira. The conspiracy was still in active existence, and the appellant was still a member of it. It was his intention to use violence when occasion demanded it, and he did use violence. He was, as we have said, a rebel in arms against the

Crown and in the unlawful possession of deadly weapons. In these circumstances it appears to be immaterial whether he used those weapons in acts of aggression or of resistance.

26. With regard to the actual occurrences at Gahira, there is no need to say very much. Counsel has argued that we should not believe Prosonno Talukdar (P. W. 122) who says that the three revolvers were made over to him by the appellant. This argument is based on his failure to make a definite statement to this effect at the time, and to the language of the search list. For the reasons given by the Commissioners we are prepared to accept this witness's version of the incident. Moreover the mere question of physical delivery seems to us of no great importance. Having regard to the position occupied by the appellant in the conspiracy, and to the fact that the revolvers have been shown to be part of the Armoury Raid booty, we think that the appellant has been rightly held to have been found in joint possession of them and of the explosives recovered at Gahira, independently of the part he is said to have played in surrendering the weapons.

27. A word should here be said as to the documents seized by the police at Gahira. The most important of these are Ex. 223, found on the person of the appellant, Exs. 226, 227, 235, 239 found in the "ghar" of Purno Chandra Talukdar, and the Ex. 127 series, which consists of documents which were dropped from the sari of the female appellant at the time of her arrest.

28. As to this series we may say that we agree with the Commissioners that the account given of the circumstances in which the documents were found by Sepoy Samendar Khan of the Jat Regiment, P. W. 80, and put in his shoe and not made over to the sepoy's jamadar until the afternoon of the next day, is reliable. Samendar Khan is not a police officer, and has no experience in criminal investigation, and having regard to a sepoy's standard of education, it is by no means surprising, that he should not appreciate the importance of documents found on arrested persons, and the necessity of making such documents over to his superiors at the first opportunity.

29. The effect of these documents is in our opinion damning. It is not necessary to assign a meaning to every line. For example in Ex. 127(d) it is unnecessary to decide whether 'D. M.' stands for District Magistrate, or "baby" for revolvers or whether the existence of a plot to assassinate the District Magistrate of Chittagong is disclosed. Such are the Advocate-General's suggestions and they

possess a high degree of probability. But even if we discard them, this document and others clearly establish that in May 1933 the revolutionaries at Gahira were receiving letters from an inmate of the jail discussing a scheme for a jail rising and the rescue of the appellant Sen. This particular document is stated by Mr. Bennett to be in the handwriting of Amulya Biswas, detinue confined in Chittagong jail at that time. For our purpose the precise identity of the writer is of no particular importance, for the internal evidence clearly proves that, whoever he was, he was then an inmate of the jail and was in communication with the appellant Dastidar and his companions with regard to plans of the nature we have mentioned. Ex. 223, which, as we have observed, was found on the appellant's person, proves in our opinion that at this stage the appellant Dastidar was, to adopt the language of the learned Advocate-General, at the helm of the conspiracy. It was from him that the revolutionaries and their sympathisers sought directions as to the best manner in which their unlawful activities could be employed. Mr. Basu has described the inferences, that we hold, have been rightly drawn, as "mere speculation." In our opinion however they are irresistible, the more so as there is no attempt at a rival interpretation, although the writers would presumably frame their communications in terms intelligible to the recipient. We are satisfied that, after the arrest of the appellant Sen, his mantle fell upon the shoulders of Tarakeshwar Dastidar and that in May 1933 he was the leader of the conspiracy and was so regarded by the other conspirators.

30. We have finally to consider the case of the female appellant, with regard to whom we have not thought it necessary to call on Counsel for the Crown. The suspicions of the police, that she was a possible conspirator, were first aroused by the fact that she was arrested dressed as a boy in Pahartali on 17th September 1932. She was released on bail on 23rd November 1932 and thereafter disappeared. At that time a bad livelihood case under Section 109, Criminal P. C., was pending against her. She is said to have been at Dhalghat at the time of the capture of the appellant Sen and to have succeeded in evading arrest. At the time of her apprehension at Gahira an important document, Ex. 156, was found on the premises. It has been proved by Mr. Bennett, after comparison with admitted documents, to be in the handwriting of the female appellant. We have made a similar comparison ourselves, and see no reason to doubt the correctness of the expert witness's opinion. The document is in a mutilated condition, but the substance of it can for the most part easily be ascertained. In it the writer states that while a student at the Bethune College she became imbued with revolutionary ideas and "joined the organization." She says that after the

Armoury Raid she devoted herself to the organization and she describes a plot for rescuing the undertrial prisoners and the introduction of arms and explosives into the jail for this object. Owing to the mutilated state of the document it is not possible to say whether she claims to have taken an active part in this. She next says that she was summoned by the “venerable leader” to take part in the Pahartali raid and describes how her participation therein was prevented by her arrest. She states that she absconded “to fulfil her hankering after some revolutionary action.” She refers to an engagement with the police at Gairala “where the great masterda was arrested.” It is not clear whether she was personally present on that occasion, but she says “the tragedy” touched her heart, and her hankering for practical action grew more intense. She says her desire is going to be fulfilled “to-day” by the newly elected President, that what she is about to do is not “a whimsical act,” and that she is going to sacrifice her life.

31. Now, that is a highly important document and it is significant that it nowhere appears that the writer has ever put forward any explanation of it or repudiated the admissions contained in it. Counsel for the appellant has complained that the prosecution have failed to corroborate the statement contained in it. We shall consider at a later stage the correctness of this assertion, but at the moment we feel compelled to observe that this line of criticism in our opinion proceeds on a wholly erroneous assumption. If a person voluntarily elects to put on record a statement of his criminal activities, and thereafter neither repudiates that statement nor offers a reasonable explanation of it, he has no grievance whatever if the Court regards that statement as conclusive against him. In such circumstances there is no burden placed on the Crown of (establishing the truth of the admissions of guilt.

32. It has been suggested by counsel that the document may be a fiction composed for purposes of publicity, and it is pointed out that Ex. 56 (Pritilata’s statement) was in fact printed and circulated in the form of a leaflet, a specimen of which is on the record. This explanation has never been definitely advanced by the writer of the document even in her grounds of appeal and represents at the most an ingenious surmise on the part of her counsel. It may be conceded, that the arrangement and language of Ex. 156 render it highly probable that the appellant had Ex. 56 in her mind when she composed Ex. 156, and that to this extent the former document served as a model for the latter. But from this it is quite impossible to draw the conclusion that the statements of fact in Ex. 156, which to a large extent deal with events as to which Ex. 56 is silent, are untrue. Finally, if we apply the test of corroboration, though in our opinion it is in the

circumstances altogether unnecessary that this test should be satisfied, we find the appellant's assertions as to her activities corroborated in a most remarkable manner. Reference must again be made to Ex. 199 which, it will be remembered, is the appellant Sen's account of the way in which girls and women were introduced into the revolutionary movement. It describes in great detail the doings of one Anita, who is said to have been in October 1929 a first year student in Calcutta. After dealing with the Armoury Raid there is a statement that "a few months after the raid" the writer established communication with Anita, who procured in Calcutta materials for the projected dynamite outrage in the jail and managed to arrange for the introduction of arms, money, etc", into the jail. The document states that the writer decided to see Anita personally towards the end of the summer vacation of 1931, but that there were difficulties as she was "being looked on with suspicion by the I. B. by this; time." In fact the police records show that it was in the middle of July 1931 that the female appellant was placed under police observation.

33.The meeting, was finally brought about clearly in the: rainy season of 1931, and before the Puja vacation of that year or at any rate before the arrival of military reinforcements in December 1931, which rendered meeting difficult. Referring to this period the writer states: "Anita was reading in Chittagong College then." Now the records of the College have been put in and proved by the accountant of the College and they show that not only is this statement true of the female appellant, but it is true of no other woman in the world. The witness states that the appellant was admitted in September, 1931, and that prior to her admission there had been no female student since 1927. After the appellant's admission there was no female student admitted until March 1932, that is to say, until a time considerably later than the period of which the writer is speaking.

34.In our opinion it has been conclusively shown that the Anita of Ex. 199 is the female appellant, in spite of the fact that there is no positive evidence that she was ever called Anita, and the fact that it is common ground that her nickname or pet name is "Bhulu". We consider that the appellant's admissions as to her connexion with the dynamite conspiracy find full corroboration in the contents of Ex. 199. This being so it is unnecessary to decide whether, as is claimed by the prosecution, the document Ex.317 signed "Ajit", is in the handwriting of the appellant, or, if it is, what inference can be drawn from it as to her complicity in the first dynamite plot.

35. The statements in Ex. 156 as regards the intention of the female appellant to participate in the Pahartali raid are clearly corroborated by the facts relating to her arrest on 17th September, with which we have dealt above. As regards her presence at Gairala, on 16th February 1933, we do not feel justified in drawing any conclusion from Ex. 156, since the part of it which is concerned with this incident is so seriously mutilated as to make satisfactory deduction impossible. It is true that female garments were discovered at Gairala, which would indicate that there was a woman among the party of which the appellant Sen was one. There was also found here a letter in Bengali addressed to the female appellant's brother, Phaya. This is Ex. 197; and in its present state it bears the English date 16th February 1933. The Bengali portion has been shown to be in the handwriting of the female appellant, who, it is proved, has a brother who is known as Phaya. Doubt however is cast on the genuineness of the English date; attention is drawn to the fact that when the document was photographed the portion containing the date was not reproduced. It is said that this was due to an oversight on the part of those responsible for the photography.

36. We do not think it necessary to go further into the matter, and we clearly hold that in the absence of oral evidence we are unable to say that the presence of the female appellant at Gairala on 16th February 1933 has been conclusively established. It is common ground that she was arrested at Gahira on 19th May 1933, and having regard to her writings and her general conduct prior to that date, we have no doubt that her reason for being at Gahira was her determination to take an active part in the conspiracy and to carry on the war the conspirators were waging. We have no doubt therefore that she has been rightly convicted of waging and abetting the waging of war against the King. We may however notice that as a last resort a suggestion was put forward that her reason for associating with the appellant Dastidar was not that she wished to co-operate with him in carrying out the object of the conspiracy, but that her connexion with him was solely of a sentimental nature. Again this explanation has never been put forward by the appellant herself and there is nothing at all to support it.

37. Reference was made to Ex. 186 found on the person of the appellant Sen at the time of his arrest. There is a statement in the exhibit that Bhulu has been playing tricks, and that she appears to be cheerful because Futu and others are expected. The most this document could possibly be said to indicate is the wounded vanity of a middle aged man on discovering that a young woman naturally prefers the company of a man of 23 to his own. In any case Ex. 186 cannot possibly be used as a ground to support the suggestion of sentimental

association, made as far as we can see for the first time in this Court. We have now considered the merits of the case of each appellant, and after setting aside the convictions of Tarakeshwar Dastidar and Kalpana Dutt, under Section 4(b), Explosive Substances Act, we are of opinion that the convictions of all the appellants under the other sections must be maintained.

38. As to, the question of sentence, the commissioners state that with regard to the appellant Sen, they are unanimously of opinion that nothing but the extreme penalty will meet the ends of justice. We are in entire agreement with them on this point. We have no doubt that ever since his release from internment in 1928 this appellant has been planning and plotting against the King's Government. His plans were put into active operation on 18th April 1930, and up to the date of his arrest they were pursued with complete ruthlessness and disregard for the sanctity of human life. He has been found to be personally responsible for the deaths of Capt. Cameron and Mrs. Sullivan, and we consider him responsible for the death of victims of the Armoury Raid. We therefore confirm the sentence of death passed by the Commissioners under Section 376, Criminal P. C. The Commissioners state that the case of the appellant Tarakeshwar Dastidar presents more difficulty, but after anxious consideration they have unanimously come to the conclusion that the extreme penalty should be imposed. We also have considered the matter, with great care, and we are of opinion that the Commissioners rightly thought it inconsistent with their duty to award a less severe punishment. Since April 1930, and probably before, Tarakeshwar Dastidar has been an active member of this conspiracy, in pursuance of which a considerable number of the King's servants and the King's subjects have lost their lives. He has rightly been found guilty of attempting to murder Sub-Inspector Bhattacharji, and of an overt act of waging war at Gahira where on his arrest he was discovered to be in the unlawful possession of arms and explosives. So far from the arrest of his co-appellants in February 1933 putting an end to his criminal activities, he thereupon assumed a more prominent position among the conspirators, and, as the documents show, he was up to the very last entertaining and discussing plans for further outrages. These facts make it quite impossible for us to disagree with the Commissioners and reduce the capital sentence which we confirm under the section referred to. The sentence of transportation for life passed on the appellant Kalpana Dutt is the lightest penalty which the law permits for the offence of which she has been convicted. It has not been suggested that the sentence should be enhanced, and so we are not called upon to offer any observations with regard to it. The result is therefore that except with regard to the convictions under Section 4(b), Explosive Substances

Act, to which we have referred, the appeals of all the appellants are dismissed. In their judgment the Commissioners have commended the work of the police in investigating the case. We think their commendation well merited. In conclusion we wish to place on record our appreciation of the care and ability displayed by the Commissioners in the performance of their task. In spite of the mass of material the conduct of the trial was in all respects satisfactory, and the judgment delivered by the Commissioners is remarkable for its clear analysis of the evidence and for the sound reasoning by which the conclusions set out therein have been reached. Moreover it is abundantly clear that every submission made on behalf of the accused persons was most carefully and anxiously weighed by the tribunal.

16.Pramod Ranjan Choudhury eventually moved to Anushilan Party. He was hanged along with Ananta Hari Mitra for having assassinated Rai Bahadur Bhupendra Chatterji on 28 May 1926.

17.Do And Die, Manini Chatterjee, p. 300.

18.After his release, Ananda Prasad Gupta sued the British government over this issue and won his case.

19.‘Master-da’s Surjya Sen’s hanging and the torture in jail’ by Kali Kinkar De published in Biplobi Mahanayak Surjya Sen O Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930–34.

20.The eyewitness, Nur Ahmed, was located and interviewed by Hayat Hussain, assistant professor of history and dean of the Faculty of Arts, Chittagong University in 1984–85.

No. 00767

Telegram

Dt. 19.4.30

XKF Chittagong 19 St E 161 Bengal, Calcutta

Disturbance began without warning about ten night. Telephone Exchange burnt, Auxiliary Force Armoury and Police Armouries gutted. Armament at disposal only ninety rifles and two or three Lewis guns. Police arms battered and burnt, not more than sixty serviceable with little ammunition. Raiders fully equipped with modern arms and many revolvers looted from armoury as well as fifty four police muskets and unknown quantity ammunition. Number of raiders difficult to estimate. But believed to be about one hundred to be in surrounding hills. Total casualties known, 2 Europeans two constables, three taxi drivers. Besides few wounded. Some European women and children placed on steamer, Railway Line reported cut about 30 miles from Chittagong, Farmer has wired for men and Eastern Frontier Rifles from some other districts.

Wilkinson

District Magistrate

rs

CHITTAGONG

Dt. 20.4.30

To

BENGAL CALCUTTA

HAVE JUST RETURNED FROM EIGHT HOUR SEARCH OF HILLS NORTH OF CHITTAGONG. OPERATIONS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT ON ACCOUNT OF HILLY COUNTRY AND DENSE JUNGLE. FAILED TO GET IN TOUCH. BUT OBTAINED UNMISTAKABLE EVIDENCE OF THEIR RECENT PRESENCE. NOW BELIEVE ALL GANG TO BE IN THE HILLS. AN AEROPLANE WOULD BE INVALUABLE TOMORROW MORNING.

POLICE

Source: Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930–34 Aalokmela (Biplob Teerth Chattogram Smriti Sansthan Prakashan, Shaheed Surya Sen Bhavan)

ALIPORE CENTRAL JAIL

Thursday 2 pm

8/7/1931

Chapala-di,

I have received your letter along with that of Moni-da's. How is Moni-da now? Do let me know. Not having received your letter I had assumed that mine had not reached you. Please do not think that I am angry with you.

I have been deserted by my companion and he has already left me. As a result I find myself left all alone. My time is not yet over. I will have to welcome the dawn along with the others in this world for a few more days. I wait for the day that the light will fade from my eyes. I do not know as to when that day, the one I pray for, will arrive.

Didi, is there nothing called a man's own desire? It is true that we cannot accomplish things just because we wish them to be so. Everything happens

according to the wish of the One who grants wishes. We tiny humans can never fathom as to how and when He lays to rest our pride, our abhiman and leads us down unknown paths which like a great river gives no clue as to where its banks lie.

Such a day will come. And on that day when the tremendous judgement is delivered I will be unable to not lay my proud upright head upon that altar. This is why the poet has written the song Aamar matha noto korey dau hey tomar choron dhular toley. Shokol ahonkar hey aamar dobao chokher joley ... Bend my head till it lies on the dust at Your feet. Drown every arrogance of mine in my tears.

That surrendering of the soul! What infinite peace it will bring. I am trying to cleanse my mind of every petty thought, of every hurt and sorrow and prepare for that ultimate surrender. But why am I not being successful?

I hope with your blessings my efforts will not go in vain. No matter how, aamar baithar pujo koribo samapan ...I will complete the worship of which, this my life with its numerous trials and tribulations are a part.

I take your leave. Didi, how are you keeping? I am well.

Worthy of your love

Ledu

Known to five others as Ram Krishna Biswas

Source: translated from Baithar Pujo Koribo Samapan, Ananda Bazar Patrika, 13 Srabon 1338, page 7.

rs

C/o Sj Chandra Kumar Sen

Rahamatganj

(Northern bank of Dewanji's Pukur) Chittagong

Chittagong Jail

Prisoner's Letter

From

Surjya Kumar Sen

Condemned Prisoner

21.11.33

My beloved boudi,

Please accept my bhaktipurna pronams (devoted salutations). I have received your letters of 20th October, 3rd November and Moni's letter of 7th Kartik all together on 11th November. I have not received the ashtadurba (eight blades of grass offered to the gods) that you said you had sent. I hope you have received the letter I sent to your city address on 8th November.

Please give my devoted salutations to Dada, Mej-di (second older sister) and other elders and my love and blessings to Kamal, Ajit, Gopal, Rakhal, Moni, Phoni, Badal and other youngsters.

Boudi, I have heard the high court's judgement. You have all perhaps heard it too

and have been crushed by the news. That is only natural. But I expect that you, over the last nine months, would have steeled your hearts to bear this pain. I am on my way out with happiness in my heart. There is no sadness within me. And there is no reason for any of you to feel any sorrow whatsoever for you should be completely satisfied with the judgement. Despite our tight circumstances, you have all succeeded in getting Kolkata's most famous barrister to fight my case. Chatga, too, had appointed a very fine barrister. What more could you have done? You have accomplished more than you could have possibly afforded. When I heard that Barrister B.C. Chatterjee was representing me at high court, I was overwhelmed by gratitude and respect towards my family. Many families, in better positions than ours, have been unable to accomplish even this much. I was instantly overcome by the boundless love and tender feelings you hold for me. When judgment was pronounced, my first thought was not for myself but for you, my family. I was instantly aware of the havoc that this cruel judgment would wreck upon you. Boudi, I have been unable to give back even a fraction of all that has been done for me throughout my life. No one can repay the debt of love to the family elders. I have become indebted to you for eternity. Do not grieve for me. God is always a well-wisher. I end now.

Your loving

Sri Surjya Kumar Sen

Written from Chittagong Jail by death row prisoner Master-da Surjya Sen to his boudi (elder brother's wife).

Source: translated from Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930–34 Aalokmela (Biplob Teerth Chattogram Smriti Sansthan Prakashan, Shaheed Surya Sen Bhavan)

C/o Sj Chandra Kumar Sen

Rahamatganj

(Northern bank of Dewanji's Pukur) Chittagong

Chittagong Jail

Prisoner's Letter

From

Surjya Kumar Sen

5.12.33

Srisricharankamaleshu boudi, (one who is worthy of my touching her lotus feet, my elder brother's wife)

My beloved boudi, please accept my devotions and salutations. This is perhaps the last letter that you will receive from me. I don't know if I will have time to write anymore letters. I have written a couple of lines on the other sheet addressed to Gopal, Rakhal and Badal. Please give it to them. Please give Dada, Mej-di (second older sister) and the other elders my devoted salutations (pronam which is the act of touching an elder's feet) and my love and blessings to those that are younger. My love and blessings to the daughters-in-law of the house. I wrote a couple of letters to the family after the high court declared its judgement, I hope you have received them. Boudi, I take leave. I carry with me the sweet memory of all the love given to me by the family. Do not grieve that despite all the love showered on me it has been unable to keep me bound to this earth.

No matter how deep and limitless one's love and tender feelings, it can never keep a person indefinitely tied to earthly bonds. One day, God's law slices through every bond sending the person racing to the far bank of infinity. This is

the Creator's law. I have no regrets, no sorrows. My mind seeks the infinity. I long for God's companionship. My days pass comfortably. Four or five days ago I was gazing single-mindedly at the evening sky. The blue sky was filled with unblemished moonlight. Countless constellations had blossomed like flowers. The trees had fallen silent as if relishing the glory of nature. Without warning, my senses had drowned in the unadulterated beauty that surrounded me and I remembered Him: He who has created this beautiful universe. He who, solely for our pleasure, has left open the door to nature's store of delights. Thinking of Him flooded my mind with happiness. Many hours passed in this blissful state. It is a frequent occurrence nowadays. Boudi, I must go. But before I do, you have to bless me. I have done you all countless wrongs, please forgive me. Accept God's will as His supreme blessing. I end now,

Your loving Surjya

Written from Chittagong Jail by death row prisoner Master-da Surjya Sen to his boudi.

Source: translated from Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930–34 Aalokmela (Biplob Teerth Chattogram Smriti Sansthan Prakashan, Shaheed Surya Sen Bhavan)

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GLOSSARY OF BENGALI WORDS

Aag

Aaggey

Aamader chokhhey dhulo diye palalo kothaye. Achchha dekhbo – palabi kothaye? Dhora ki porbi na?

Aamar praan bhora aashirbaad

Aanchal

Aandolan

Aatchala

Abdaar

Abeer

Abritti

Ahimsa

Ain Amanyā

Aandolan

Akhara

Allah ho Akbar

Almirah

Aalok

Aalta

Amar

Amavasya

Amrit

Anna

Attar

Atyachar

Atyachari

Baas

Baba

Babu

Bagaan-bari

Bagh

Bahurupia

Balika

Bande Mataram

Basha

Bau

Bazaar

Beedi

Beel

Bel

Bhaat

Bhadralok

Bhagya

Bhai

Bhai-rey-bhai

Bharatvarsh

Bharatvarshi

Bhiru Bangali

Bhojali

Bhojali

Bhojon

Bhoy

Bhrahmacharya

Bigah

Bijoya

Bikrom

Biplob

Boloon

Bon

Bor-da

Boudi

Bundobust

Burkha

Burra

Busti

Cha

Chacha

Chai

Chandal

Chandan

Chaprassi

Char

Cheerey

Chhoi

Chhokra

Chik

Chol

Chot-potey

Choubachcha

Chowki

Crore

Da

Dada Babu

Dada

Dadi

Dakaat

Dal

Danda-beri

Daroga

Daya

Debota

Dekhli

Dera

Deshpran

Devi

Dhaba

Dhan khet

Dhoop

Dhuti

Di

Didi

Didimoni

Dighi

Dikkha

Durbar

Duronto

Durry

Dushshashan

Dushtu

Ejlash

Eto

Ferari

Firingee

Gaj

Gamchha

Ghee

Ghomta

Ghrina

Gita

Godha

Golmal

Gup

Haat

Hajat-ghar

Hartal

Hato Bhago! Jaan Bachao

Hilsa

Hoi-hoi-roi-roi

Ingrez

Jaat

Jaithaima

Jaithamoshai

Jamadar

Jamadarni

Japani kusti

Jatra

Ji

Ji

Joy

Juddho

Kaka

Kakima

Kala Pani

Kalchand

Kali Bari

Kansha

Kantha

Kartik

Kaun hai

Khaddar

Khabar

Khal

Khalaas

Khansama

Khela

Khichuri

Khoi

Khoka

Khol

Khoob anondo

hochchhey

Khunti

Ki hotey paarey

Ki korchhilish

etokhun

Kirtan

Kobi

Kokil

Kon hai? Kya

mangta hai

Korobi

Koruna

Kotha

Kukri

Kusti

Kutcha

Kutchery

Lajja

Lakh (lac)

Lathi

Lokkhi

Lomba

Luchi

Lungi

Ma

Machaan

Madur

Maidan

Majhi

Mali

Mama

Mamar-bari

Mamima

Maangsho-bhaat

Maangsho-porotha

Mantra

Masala

Mashima

Maya

Meherbani

Mej-da

Meshomoshai

Mir Jafar

Mon

Moori

Moshai

Moshai

Mount Kailash

Mourghee

Mukti Aadesh-nama

Murga

Mushaira

Nalla

Namastey

Natok

Nazar-bandi

Neem

Nikumma

Nouko

Paagol

Pallu

Paltan

Panja

Panta-bhaat

Pari nai

Peyey boshbey

Phalar

Phool

Pishemoshai

Pishima

Porotha

Potol

Pradeep

Pronam

Proshaad

Pugla

Pugla

Pukur

Pul

Purna swaraj

Purnima

Purut

Raag

Rajmistri

Raksha kabaj

Riyaz

Rohu

Roop

Sadhu

Sajna Danta

Samadhi

Samiti

Sandesh

Sandhi

Sanyas

Sanyasi

Seer

Sej-da

Shaala

Shaathi

Shahbaash

Shahosh

Shakti

Shashan

Shataranji

Sheedur

Shikaar

Shikkha

Shinduk

Shingho bikrom

Shishu

Shoontki

Shoopoori

Shorbonash

Sipahi

Sraddha ceremony

Sraddha

Surahi

Swadeshi

Swadhin

Talwar

Teerth

Thakur

Thakur-Dada (Dadu)

Thakur-Ma

Thala

Thamo

Tila

Tui

Tumasha

Ude-thakur

Upasana griha

Uthon

Vakalatnama

Vibhag

Vidrohi

Zila

PRONUNCIATION

ch as in the Hindi word chamcha

chch as in the Hindi word bachcha

chh as in the Hindi word chhatri

PLACES

British names

India

Calcutta

Midnapore

Alipore

Comilla

Burdwan

Dacca

Chandernagore

Cawnpore

Hooghly

Bombay

Indian names

Bharat; Bharatvarsh; Hindustan

Kolkata

Medinipur

Alipur

Kumilla

Barddhaman

Dhaka

Chandannagar

Kanpur

Hugli

Mumbai

PEOPLE TELLING THE STORY

Ananda Prasad Gupta

Ram Krishna Biswas

Lady Kathleen Tegart

Sir Charles Tegart

Ananta Lal Singh

Suresh De

John Younie

Dorothy Younie

Lokenath Bal

Sergeant Blackburn

Sergeant Morsehead

Wilkinson – 2 stories

Alexander Burnett

Sub Inspector Hem Gupta

Ambika Charan Chakraborty

Kalpana Dutt

Premlata

Kundaprabha

Biren De

Pritilata Waddadar

Haripada Bhattacharya

Kali Kinkar De

Angus Kennedy

Mahendra Choudhury

Brajen Sen

WHO'S WHO

INDIAN CAMP

Abani Mukherji: Part of the Joteen Mookerjee team that was involved in the Indo-German conspiracy during WW I. He went to Japan to establish contacts.

Abdul Ghaffar Khan: The leader of the Pathans; known as Frontier Gandhi; also called Badshah Khan by the Pathans.

Abdul Hakim: Ticket collector at Feni Railway Station.

Abdul Majid: Police officer who saw the Hindus in the Suluk Bahar House

Abdur Sattar (b. 1917, d. 1976): A Muslim youth who sheltered Surjya Sen and the revolutionaries many times in his house during the second phase of the revolution and arranged for shelters in the homes of Muslim families; was arrested in 1934 under the Bengal Ordinance; released in 1937; lived on in Chattogram after partition.

Afsar-ud-din: Was introduced by his classmate Ananta Lal Singh in 1918; he was not keen on having Ganesh Ghosh – a fellow classmate – in the group. Ananta Lal Singh had finally introduced Ganesh Ghosh the next year.

Ahmadur Rehman: A taxi driver whose car was taken by Lokenath Bal's team and used for the raid on the AFI armoury.

Ajit Biswas: Was introduced by Tarakeshwar Dastidar to Ram Krishna Biswas.

Akhil Chandra Dutt: The barrister from Kumilla who helped Ananta Lal Singh escape to Calcutta after the raid; also was among the team of defence lawyers in the CAR Case.

Amarendra Nandi: A student of Chattogram College; became a sanyasi; joined

the revolution reluctantly; became a member of the Sadarghat Club and a part of the Volunteer Vahini; was a part of the European Club attack team on the night of the CAR; was sent from Badulla Pahar along with Diptimedha Choudhury to contact ALS and GG; was shot dead in Chittagong city on 24 April 1930.

Ambika Charan Chakraborty (b. 28 September 1892, d. 5 March 1962): One among the leaders in group formed in 1918; helped carry the AB Railway Dacoity loot to Calcutta; consumed spurious cyanide along with Surjya Sen during the Nagarkhana Hill battle and was arrested, charged and acquitted in the Suluk Bahar Arms Case; rearrested under the Bengal Ordinance in 1924 and released in 1928; was one of the five leaders in the CAR; led the telephone bhavan and telegraph exchange wrecking team on the night of 18 April; escaped despite being injured in the Jalalabad encounter; was arrested in October 1930; sent for trial with Saroj Kanti Guha and Hemendu Bikash Dastidar in the Supplementary CAR Case and was initially sentenced to death on 10 February 1933; sentence was reduced to transportation for life after an appeal and he was sent to the Andamans; released in 1946; joined the Communist Party; died in a road accident in Calcutta.

Amjad Chacha: A Muslim farmer who looked after Ambika Chakraborty when he escaped from the battle site on Jalalabad.

Amulya Acharya (b. 1917, d. 1999): Was arrested in 1935 for murdering the police agent Paresh Gupta; was sentenced to hard labour for ten years; settled in Calcutta after independence and partition.

Amulya Biswas: Was incarcerated in Chittagong Jail for revolutionary activities tried to help Surjya Sen escape from jail by contacting Sailesh Ray.

Amulya Mukherji: Member of the Anushilan party helped Lokenath in Kumilla.

Ananda Prasad Gupta (pronounced Anondo in Bengali; called Tun by the family) (b. 1914, d. 8 December 2005): Came from an anglicized Brahmo family; was a student of the Municipal School and Collegiate School, took his matriculation exams before the CAR and found out later that he had passed; came away with Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh and Jibon Ghoshal who were taking the burnt Himangshu Bimal Sen from the police lines to a safe place in the city and as a result was separated from the main group; took part in the Feni encounter; had chickenpox by the time he reached Calcutta; went into hiding in

Chandannagar along with Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh and Jibon Ghoshal; was shot in the leg and arrested during the Chandannagar encounter and brought back for trial to Chattogram; sentenced to transportation for life to the Andamans where the inappropriate use of morphine prescribed by the jail doctor turned him into an addict; continued to be in the Andamans through the period in which the Japanese remained in occupation ie 23 March 1942 to 7 October 1945; was released in 1946 when the British regained possession; brought to his cousins' – George and Biju Patnaik – home in Ananda Bhavan, Cuttack; moved back to the hospital attached with Calcutta Medical College on account of his ill health; interned in Siuri where he met his wife Sunanda; sued the British government for his morphine addiction and won his case; was on his way to Germany for treatment when a medical emergency forced him to disembark in the UK; settled in the UK; passed away on 8 December 2005 in London.

Ananta Chakraborty: On 10 November 1925 he, along with Pramod Ranjan Choudhury and Rakhal De helped Surjya Sen escape from a police raid on the house in Shobha Bazaar before they were themselves arrested; attacked and killed Rai Bahadur Bhupen Chatterji during a meeting at Alipore Central Jail; was arrested and tried along with Nadiya's Ananta Hari Mitra, Chattogram's Sukhendu Dutt, Dhaka's Birendra Chatterji, Chattogram's Pramod Ranjan Choudhury and seven others; he and Hari Narayan Chandra were sent to the Burma Jail to serve a life sentence.

Ananta Hari Mitra (b. 1906, hanged September 1926): Belonged to Nadiya district; attacked and killed Rai Bahadur Bhupen Chatterji during a meeting at Alipore Central Jail; was arrested and tried along with Chattogram's Sukhendu Dutt, Dhaka's Birendra Chatterji, Chattogram's Pramod Ranjan Choudhury, Ananta Chakraborty and seven others; was hanged along with Pramod Ranjan Choudhury.

Ananta Lal Singh (pronounced Ononto in Bengali) (b. 1901, d. 25 January 1979): Took part in the Paraikora Dacoity; took part in an attempt to kill Sir Charles Tegart; led the AB Railway Dacoity in December 1923 and escaped from the Nagarkhana Battle site; was arrested by Sub Inspector Prafulla Roy but was acquitted; was rearrested on 1 October 1924 under the Bengal Ordinance and held until 1928; was one of the five leaders in the CAR; led the police line attack on the night of 18 April 1930; was separated from the main group on the night of 18 April 1930; took part in the Feni Encounter on 22 April 1930; went into hiding in Calcutta and then in Chandannagar; surrendered to the police on

28 June 1930; took part in the Dynamite Conspiracy while in jail; was sentenced to transportation for life and sent to the Andamans; took part in the second hunger strike in the Cellular Jail; repatriated in 1938 and released in 1946; joined the Communist Party; dreamt and plotted towards an united Bengal until the end of his life; was arrested for supposedly masterminding a successive spate of robberies, ostensibly a fund collection drive for the unification of Bengal; fought his own case; was released from jail, on account of ill health, a few months before died; he was never convicted.

Anil Bandhu Das (b. 1915, d. 1994): Was influenced by his classmates Krishna Choudhury and Ardhendu Guha and guided by Ananta Lal Singh and Ganesh Ghosh; he stole chemicals and money from his father's pharmaceutical shop and passed them onto the revolutionaries; ran away and went into hiding when the theft was discovered; was arrested in June 1930 in connection with the CAR Case; confessed and then retracted his statement; sentenced to hard labour for three years at Borstal Jail; rearrested immediately afterwards under the Bengal Ordinance; passed his matriculation while in jail.

Anil Kumar De (b. 1914): Joined the second phase of the revolution; went to Calcutta to help Indumati Singh gather materials for manufacturing landmines; helped in Dynamite Conspiracy case; was arrested in 1933 and held without trial until 1936; settled in Calcutta after independence and partition.

Anil Kumar Rakshit (b. 1915, d. 1979): Joined Surjya Sen's group in 1929; was granted bail in CAR case; was arrested in connection with the Dynamite Conspiracy Case on 3 June 1931 and sentenced to hard labour; rearrested under the Bengal Ordinance as soon as his time was up; spent a total of eight years in jail; joined the Communist Party; settled in Calcutta after independence and partition.

Anuja Sen: Belonged to the Jugantar Party; was killed in the Dalhousie Square bomb blast while trying to assassinate Sir Charles Tegart.

Anukul Mukherji: He helped ALS buy weapons in Calcutta.

Anurup Sen: A Chattogram man and a senior graduate teacher of Burul High School in the 24 Parganas; he was amongst the leaders who formed the party with Surjya Sen, Nagen Sen – Julu-da, Ambika Chakraborty and Charu Bikash Dutta in 1918 when Ananta Lal Singh first joined. He was arrested in the

Dakshineswar Bomb case in 1925 and interned in Moynaguri village where he contracted cholera and died in 1926.

Apurva Sen (Bhola): A Saroatali boy; was introduced by Tarakeshwar Dastidar to Ram Krishna Biswas and the group; was a good singer; lived with his doting dadas and boudis and used the opportunity to donate several gold ornaments to the cause; took part in Dynamite Conspiracy and worked with Kali Kinkar De and Premlata; succeeded in escaping with Kali Kinkar when the police investigating the Dynamite Conspiracy raided Kali Kinkar's home; was shot dead in the Dhalghat raid; he was seventeen when he died.

Arati Rakshit (later Singh) (b .1919): Was introduced to Kalpana Dutt and Ardhendu Guha while still a schoolgirl; at first took charge of the groups seditious materials; later Kalpana left a trunk filled with bottles of acid in her care; her elder brother Anil Rakshit was out on bail in the CAR Case and was involved in the Dynamite Conspiracy and was sentenced to hard labour; she was placed under house arrest in April 1935 and released on 1 October 1935.

Ardhendu Dutt (b. 1906, d. 1996): Joined Surjya Sen's group in 1922; was introduced by Tarakeshwar Dastidar to Ram Krishna Biswas; took care of the weapons during the 1924 to 1928 period when the party leaders were in jail; introduced his classmate, Tarakeshwar Dastidar, to Ananta Lal Singh; had taken Ananta Lal Singh to meet Surjya Sen when his wife had died; did not take part in the CAR or Battle of Jalalabad as he had been reserved for the second phase of the revolution; was employed as the residential tutor of Sukhendu Bikash Dastidar's younger brother; helped the absconders in the second phase; was arrested in September 1930 under the Bengal Ordinance for eight years; his parents were arrested and sentenced to hard labour in 1934 for sheltering absconders; settled in independent India.

Ardhendu Guha (Shishu) (b. 1912): Son of a Congressman; was introduced by Ananta Lal Singh to Surjya Sen in 1929; was in the pamphlets distribution team in the CAR; arrived at Ganesh Ghosh's shop to join up with the army on the night of the 18th but finding no one there returned home; was arrested within a couple of hours and taken to jail; granted bail in CAR case; led the Dynamite Conspiracy and was arrested in connection with it on 4 June 1931; was sentenced to hard labour and released in 1938; opened a photography studio in Chattogram with the help of Sarat Chandra Bose – his studio displayed the photographs of the revolutionaries on the walls; was re arrested at the start of

World War II under the Defence of India Act and released in 1941; after Ananta Lal Singh's and Ganesh Ghosh's release in 1946, Ardhendu's wife Nivedita carried two army revolvers for them to Calcutta; after partition Ardhendu Guha settled in Calcutta and opened a photography studio in College Street. It became a meeting point for Surjya Sen's group; Ganesh Ghosh was made president and The Biplob Teerth Chattogram Smriti Sanstha was founded in 1970 and Ardhendu Guha became its secretary; in 1987 they built the Surya Sen Bhavan.

Ardhendu Shekhar Dastidar: Homeopathy student and a devotee of Shri Ram Krishna who lived at the Congress Office with Surjya Sen; was the younger brother of Purnendu Dastidar; was burnt along with Tarakeshwar Dastidar while making explosives; was mortally injured in the Battle of Jalalabad and was removed to hospital where he was interrogated before he passed away.

Arun Dastidar (Tulu) (b. 1915, d. 2000): The son of a port trust officer and not in the police eye; helped in the second phase of the revolution; hid a trunk of acid and gunpowder in his house; carried out research on the areas to be mined; was arrested in May 1932 and held without trial for four years; released in 1942; took part in the Bharat Chhoro Aandolan.

Ashu Ranjan De (b. 1914): Was introduced by Sukhendu Bikash Dutt in 1929; lived on the banks of the Askar Khan Dighi and helped in Dynamite Conspiracy; was arrested in June 1931; was acquitted but made to leave Chattogram; arrested from Calcutta on 7 December 1933 under the Bengal Ordinance and moved between jails until he was finally interned in his own home on the banks of Askar Khan Dighi in 1937; released in 1938; settled in independent India.

Ashutosh Bhattacharya: Brother of Bhabatosh Bhattacharya; was set free in the CAR case because of lack of evidence.

Aswini Choudhury (b. 1912, d. 1940): Was a part of the Telephone Bhavan wrecking team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; returned home and was arrested in connection with the CAR Case; acquitted and rearrested immediately under the Bengal Ordinance until 1937; suffered a head injury while in jail which cost him his sight; he died three years later.

Aswini Guha: This twenty-five-year-old was arrested in April 1931 on the charge of helping absconders; moved around to many jails; finally declared mad and sent to the asylum at Ranchi where he died in 1934.

Aswini Kumar Bhattacharya: Head Master Collegiate School.

Badal: A member of the Bengal Volunteers, Sudhir Gupta of BBD trio was involved in the shoot out at Writers Building and was said to be the one who killed Colonel N.S. Simpson.

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay: Author of Anandomoth and the song 'Bande Mataram'.

Barindra Ghose: (Barin) Was the younger brother of Aurobindo Ghose and the founder of the Bengal movement.

B.C. Roy (Dr): Mayor of Calcutta.

Beni Choudhury and Dhiren Das: The local guides who had brought Kali Kinkar De and Tarakeshwar Dastidar from the Amiable Shelter at Habilash Dwip to the rendezvous spot by the pukur on the night of the Gairala encounter when Surjya Sen was arrested.

Benoy Krishna Basu: A member of the Bengal Volunteers; killed Mr Lowman at the Dacca Mitford Hospital; committed suicide after the attack on Writers Building as part of the BBD trio, which claimed Colonel Simpson's life.

Benu Ghoshal (b. 1917, d. 1990): Younger brother of Jibon Ghoshal; was introduced at the behest of Ananta Lal Singh by Ardhendu Guha in 1931; helped Kalpana Dutt in the Dynamite Conspiracy case after Ardhendu Guha was held back in jail; funded the revolutionaries with money without his father's knowledge; researched areas that were to be mined; was arrested and held for three years.

Bhabatosh Bhattacharya (b. 1913, d. 1948): Was the son of Bipin Bhattacharya, the Hindu priest at the Sadarghat Kali Bari; took part in the CAR and the Battle of Jalalabad; his brother Ashutosh was arrested; after eight months of remaining in hiding he left with Haripada Mahajan and went to Burma; was helped by Haripada Mahajan's family contacts; was joined by Sudhangshu Basu some four years later. Burma was occupied by the Japanese in 1942, the British fled and Haripada Mahajan died the same year. In 1945 the British retook Burma and offered to help the Indians in Burma return home and Bhabatosh and Sudhangshu availed the opportunity; the family took a while to recognize them and in a few days they were taken to jail, however the situation was no longer

conducive to carry out a trial and they were released.

Bhola Nath Chatterji: Was a part of the Indo-German conspiracy during WWI.

Bhola: See Apurva Sen.

Bhupen Dutt (Bhupendra Kumar Dutt) (b. 8 October 1894, d. 29 December 1979) led the Calcutta team of Jugantar; took charge of ALS, GG, AG and JG in Calcutta and moved them to Chandernagore; was arrested in 1930 and kept in jail for 8 years; elected as an MP in Pakistan, before serving as an MLA.; returned to India in 1962; wrote the biography of Joteen Mookerjee.

Bidhu Bhushan Bhattacharya (Bidhu): A youth from Kumilla who graduated from Chittagong Medical College with a gold medal; took part in the CAR; was in the team that had gone to attack the European Club; died at Jalalabad.

Bidhu Bhushan Sen (b. 1910, d. 1993): Was a Saroatali High School student and was introduced by Tarakeshwar Dastidar to Surjya Sen who gave him the responsibility of the Cox's Bazar group of revolutionaries; he introduced Nirmal Lala the youngest martyr of the Battle of Jalalabad; was a part of the police line attack team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; since he was not known to the police he was sent back to Cox's Bazar; he was arrested and brought to Chattogram Jail but was released for lack of evidence; went into hiding and got back in touch with Surjya Sen; helped Ardhendu Guha keep in touch with Surjya Sen during the Dynamite Conspiracy; was arrested again under the Bengal Ordinance and held without trial; joined the Communist Party and settled in East Pakistan which later became Bangladesh.

Bimal Dasgupta: He and Jatijiban Ghose of the Bengal Volunteers murdered James Peddie District Magistrate Medinipur on 7th April 1931. Kanai Bhattacharya pretended to be Bimal Dasgupta and shot dead R.R. Garlick, district and sessions judge of Alipore and then committed suicide. Bimal was arrested when he tried shooting Mr Villiers on 29th October 1931.

Bina Das: A student of the Diocesan College who shot at Sir Stanley Jackson during a convocation ceremony in 1932.

Binod Bihari Choudhury (b. 1911): Took part in the police line attack on the night of the CAR; took part and was injured in the Battle of Jalalabad; went into hiding in Dhaka; was arrested on 18 August 1933 but as there was no evidence

to connect him to the CAR or the other cases he was detained under the Bengal Ordinance until 1938; got a law degree while in jail; joined the Congress; was personal secretary to Nellie Sengupta; settled in and continues to live in Chattogram which became first a part of East Pakistan and is now a part of Bangladesh.

Binod Bihari Dutt (b. 1908, d. 1998): Introduced by Kalipada Chakraborty in 1926 while he was still a schoolboy; was a part of the police line attack team on the night of the CAR; took part and was grievously injured in the Battle of Jalalabad and was taken to his sister's house in Fatehabad by Kali Kinkar De; regained his health and contacted Surjya Sen within two months; carried a reward of Rs 1000/- on his head; was with Tarakeshwar Dastidar (Phutu) when they were chased by Sub-Inspector Sashank Bhattacharya whom Tarakeshwar eventually killed ... according to Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930 -34 Aalokmela, published by Biplob Teerth Chattogram Smriti Sansthan Prakashan, Shaheed Surya Sen Bhavan. (However, Ananta Lal Singh says it was Biren De who was with Tarakeshwar Dastidar during the incident and gives the date as March 31; Surjya Sen made him the head of the Noakhali zila; was a part of original plan in which he and a few others would lob hand bombs at the crowd and give Haripada the chance to enter the ring that surrounded Ahsanulla – this plan however failed; guided Sailesh Ray in the murder of the police superintendent of Comilla, Mr Ellison; became the IRA leader after Tarakeshwar Dastidar; masterminded the cricket ground attack of 7 January 1934 as a protest against the sentences pronounced for Surjya Sen and Tarakeshwar Dastidar.

Binodini Sen (b. 1894, d. 1986): Mother of Rajat Sen; donated her ornaments and money for the cause; allowed the youngsters to take her husband's rifle and practise shooting; permitted the leaders to use the rooms upstairs for their meetings while she remained on guard; permitted Rajat to take away his father's rifle two or three days before the CAR; the rifle was discovered at the armoury which led to her husband's arrest; gave refuge to Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh, Ananda Prasad Gupta and Jibon Ghoshal on the night of 20 April 1930; had received Rajat and his companions on the night of 6 May 1930, the house had been raided that night and Rajat, Deboprasad, Swadesh and Monoranjan killed at the Kalarpol encounter; six months later Ananta Lal Singh had sent her a letter by the hand of Ardhendu Guha requesting her help in the Dynamite Conspiracy and she permitted Ardhendu Guha, Kalpana Dutt and Apurva Sen to use her house for the manufacturing explosives; it was on her property that Kalpana Dutt fired a revolver for the first time; kept the three revolvers Surjya

Sen had sent via Ardhendu Guha in safe keeping until they could be smuggled into jail; kept the trunk filled with bottles of acid that Kalpana had brought from Calcutta; gave Kalpana refuge the day she was chased by the police, but Kalpana had been arrested later that evening while trying to make her way back to Kattali village; then she lost touch with the revolutionaries and moved to Calcutta after independence and partition.

Binoy Kumar Sen (Binoy-da) (b. 1905): Participated in the AB Railway Strike led by Deshpriya Jatindra Mohan Sengupta in 1921; took responsibility of the Raozan district, Noapara and Koyepara areas during the 1924 to 1928 period when the leaders were jailed under the Bengal Ordinance; taught in the Koyepara school; did not take part in the CAR or the Battle of Jalalabad as he had been one of the first rankers reserved for the second phase; his home became Surjya Sen's headquarters in the period immediately following the Battle of Jalalabad; with Ardhendu Dutt, Manindra Majumdar, Sachindra Prasad Sen, he moved between the villages and districts building up the teams and coordinating plans for the guerrilla warfare; arrested on 30 October 1931; released in 1938; joined the Communist Party; lived on in Chattogram after independence and partition.

Bipin Bhattacharya: The purut at the Sadarghat Kali Bari and the father of Bhabatosh and Ashutosh.

Bipin Bihari Ghosh: Ganesh Ghosh's father.

Biren De: See Birendra Krishna De.

Biren Dutt Gupta: Shot Shamsul Alam.

Birendra Krishna De (Biren De) (b. 1908, accidentally shot dead March 1931): Part of the Telephone Bhavan wrecking team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; was with Tarakeshwar Dastidar (Phutu) when they were chased by Sub-Inspector Sashank Bhattacharya and Tarakeshwar had eventually killed him (Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930–34 Aalokmela, published by Biplob Teerth Chattogram Smriti Sansthan Prakashan, Shaheed Surya Sen Bhavan says it was Binod Bihari Dutt and date as 31 May 1931); Biren took Surjya Sen to the secret meetings; was accidentally shot during a firing practice which led to his death; was looked after by a notorious dacoit, Gagan Ghose, until he passed away and was buried on the banks of the Srimati river.

Bireshwar Roy (b. 1913, d. 1991): was introduced by Kalipada Chakraborty in 1927; was responsible for keeping the arms safe after the CAR and Battle of Jalalabad; took part in the 1st failed attempt on the AB Railway Institute Pahartali led by Shaileshwar Chakraborty; took part in the 2nd attempt on the AB Railway Institute Pahartali led by Pritilata Waddadar; was arrested in 1933 and held without trial until 1938; settled in Calcutta in independent India.

B.K. Banerjee: Of the Hindustan Republication Association; plotted the assassination of Tegart in 1927

Bon Bihari Dutt (b. 1911, d. 1994): Joined Surjya Sen's group in 1926; organized the music session in the field to draw crowds away from the Congress office the day Tarakeshwar Dastidar and Ardhendu Shekhar Dastidar had been burnt in an explosion and were being evacuated; was a part of the police line attack team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; was arrested in May but released within two months for lack of evidence; was arrested in September 1930 under the Bengal Ordinance and held without trial; passed his BA exams from within jail; joined the Communist Party after release; settled in Calcutta and worked in the Calcutta Corporation after independence and partition.

Brajendra Sen (Brajen) (b. 1904, d. 1988): Was the contact in Gairala village who had fixed up the home of Niranjan and Khirodprabha Biswas for the next four days; he was Zamindar Netra Sen's younger brother; he was arrested along with Surjya Sen on 16 February 1933 and identified his brother as the traitor; was satisfied that justice had been done when news arrived that Netra Sen had been beheaded; was sentenced to four years of hard labour; released in 1938; settled in Chattogram and was jailed for six years by the government of East Pakistan.

Brajendralal Choudhury (b. 1917 committed suicide in jail in 1934): Was responsible for finding shelters for the revolutionaries and for Surjya Sen' was arrested on 7 February 1933; was unable to withstand the torture in jail and committed suicide.

Chandra Shekhar-da: Gave the Chittagong boys swimming lessons.

Chandrashekhar De: Had been involved in the Raja Bazaar Bomb case; he had then reformed and tried to get Ananta Lal Singh to confess about the Paraikora

Dacoity

Charu Bikash Dutt (b. 1895): Was amongst the first ranker leaders along with Surjya Sen in 1918; he broke away from Surjya Sen's group and joined Anushilan; was arrested under the Bengal Ordinance in 1932 and was released in 1938; joined Congress Party.

Chittaranjan Das or C.R. Das (Deshbandhu): Started his career with the successful defence of Aurobindo Ghose in the 1909 Alipore Bomb Case. In December 1922, a faction of the Indian National Congress unhappy with Gandhi-ji's suspension of all civil resistance after the Chauri Chaura incident formed the Congress Khilafat Swarajya Party with Das as the president and Motilal Nehru as one of the secretaries. Other prominent members were Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, Subhas Chandra Bose and Vithalbhai Patel, whose younger brother – Vallabhbhai – remained with the No Changers who had accepted Gandhi-ji's proposal. With C.R. Das' death and Nehru's return to the mainstream Congress, the Swaraj Party lost its steam. Before his death, C.R. Das gifted his house and lands to the nation on which Chittaranjan Seva Sadan – a women's hospital was built.

Dalil Rehman: Surjya Sen's student who carried Surjya Sen's letters to his wife; carried the AB Railway Dacoity loot to Calcutta along with Ambika Chakraborty.

Deben De (Khoka): Took part in the first attempt to kill Sir Charles Tegart in Calcutta; came away from Calcutta with Ananta Lal Singh; stayed in Suluk Bahar house and took part in AB Railway Dacoity; escaped after the battle on Nagarkhana Hill; was arrested under the Bengal Ordinance of 1930; died in a motor accident in independent India.

Deboprasad Gupta (called Debu by his friends, Khoka by his parents and Dada by Ananda Prasad Gupta): Second year student of Chattogram College; involved with manufacturing explosives; the study room used by the two brothers had been converted into a lab; their home provided shelters for revolutionaries on the run and woods behind their house served as a training ground to practise firing; was a part of the police line attack team on the night of 18 April 1930 according to Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930–34 Aalokmela, published by Biplob Teerth Chattogram Smriti Sansthan Prakashan, Shaheed Surya Sen Bhavan but according to Ananta Lal Singh, he was a part of the European Club attack team;

took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; preferred to commit suicide instead of surrendering in the Kalarpol encounter; regretted he had been unable to kill Mr Lowman even as he lay dying.

Deenbandhu Majumdar; Kali Kinkar De's mama: Took part in the first failed attempt on the AB Railway Institute at Pahartali.

Dhiren Das: A revolutionary who was supposed to help Ananta Lal Singh and the boys escape from jail after the Dynamite Conspiracy. He was supposed to wait at an appointed site with a truck to drive them to the river front.

Dhirendra Lal Dastidar (Dhiren): Had lent his rifle for the CAR, which had been left behind at Ganesh Ghosh's house. Though Dhiren had not participated in the actual armoury raid and the subsequent encounters, he had been arrested and kept in jail for two years; he was acquitted for lack of evidence; eventually settled in Burma having taken up the Sikh faith and assumed the name Ranjit Singh.

Dhirendralal Barua: A school boy from Jeshtapur village who was arrested in 1931 for helping the absconders; he died after a beating in Chittagong Jail.

Dinesh Chakraborty (b. 1912): Was involved in distributing pamphlets on the night of the CAR; hid Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh, Ananda Prasad Gupta and Jibon Ghoshal in his brother's house in the Railway Quarters in Chittagong on the night of 21 April 1930 and helped them leave for Calcutta; was responsible for sending news that the raid had been successful to pamphlet distribution teams waiting in the city both times during the first unsuccessful raid on the AB Railway Institute at Pahartali led by Shaileshwar Chakraborty and the second successful raid led by Pritilata Waddadar; arrested in November 1932 and held under the Bengal Ordinance until 1938.

Dinesh Chandra Majumdar: Of the Jugantar Party; attempted to assassinate Sir Charles Tegart in Dalhousie Square by throwing bombs at his car.

Dinesh Dasgupta (b. 1911): Joined the group while still a student in the Chattogram Municipal School but became actively involved in the second phase when he helped the absconders by arranging for money and shelters; when Sachindra Prasad Sengupta (Maan-da) the area in-charge for Chattogram city went into hiding, Dinesh took over the responsibility; he had arranged for the Dhalghat shelter; was arrested after the raid on Dhalghat and was sentenced to

four years of hard labour; was sentenced to an additional year of hard labour for having disobeyed jail rules and sent to the Cellular Jail at the Andamans; participated in the hunger strike of 1932; released in 1938; joined the Congress Socialist Party and later the Lokdal; spent his last years looking after the welfare of the tribes of Bengal.

Dinesh Gupta: Of the Bengal Volunteers; was the lone survivor of the BBD trio. He was sentenced to execution by Judge Garlick.

Diptimedha Choudhury (b. 1914): Took part in the CAR; was sent from Badulla Pahar along with Amarendra Nandi to contact Ananta Lal Singh and Ganesh Ghosh but by the time they had returned the revolutionary army had moved on and as a result they lost touch; he was arrested and served for five years as a political prisoner.

Dr Bagla Chakraborty: A doctor who treated Ambika Chakraborty after Jalalabad.

Dr G.S. Bose: Lecturer on abnormal psychology at Calcutta University gave expert comments in Gopi Nath Saha's case.

Dr Jagada Ranjan Biswas: The doctor who treated Ram Krishna Biswas, Ardhendu Dastidar and Tarakeshwar Dastidar for burn injuries. ALS refers to him on one occasion as as Dr Jagada Sarkar.

Dr Narain Chandra Roy: (b. 9 October 1900, d. 2 November 1973) Came in to treat ALS in Chandannagar; manufactured bombs; was arrested and given transportation for life; carried a trunk filled with study material for the boys in the Cellular Jail in Andamans.

Durgadas Dutt Gupta Rai Bahadur: Kalpana Dutt's grandfather.

Durgakripa Biswas: Ram Krishna's father.

Dwijendranath Dastidar (Dwijen; Shonkhu) (b. 1911, d. 1982): Was a student of Chattogram College when he was introduced to Surjya Sen by Kalipada Chakraborty in 1929; was a part of telegraph and telephone office wrecking team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; since he was not a known revolutionist in the eyes of the police he left for Calcutta and passed his IA from Vidyasagar College; was arrested in May 1932 under the Bengal

Ordinance; released in 1938; joined the Forward Block; died in independent India.

Fakir Chandra Sen (Bengali records say Sengupta) (b. 1915, d. 1993): Was recruited by Bidhu Bhattacharya in 1928; was part of the police line attack team on the night of the CAR; was sent from the hills to collect news in Fatehabad and was unable to return; was arrested within a few days; confessed initially but retracted his statement later; was punched in the nose by B.J. Shooter; sent to Andamans but granted clemency; released in 1938; passed his BA from the Kanungo-para College; settled in Calcutta after independence and partition and worked in the Calcutta Corporation.

Fakir Rai Choudhury (Jibendra) (b. 1915, d. 1993): Belonged to a wealthy family and was the famous football player of Collegiate School; joined the revolution in the second phase and helped by keeping contraband items in his house and supported the group with money; was arrested in 1933 and held for five years.

Fazlur Rehman: Jail warder who tried to help Surjya Sen escape from Chittagong Jail.

Gagan Ghose: The bandit who looked after Biren De till he died.

Gamma: See Prafulla Das.

Gandhi: Also called Malang Baba, Mahatma or Bapu.

Ganesh Ghosh (b. 22 June 1900, d. 22 December 1992): Introduced to Surjya Sen in 1919 by Ananta Lal Singh; took part in the Ashahjog Aandolan; was arrested in the 1923 Maniktala Bomb Case but was acquitted; arrested on 1 October 1924 under the Bengal Ordinance and released in 1928; was one of the five leaders in the CAR; led the police line attack on the night of 18 April 1930; was separated from the main group on the night of 18 April 1930; took part in the Feni Encounter on 22 April 1930; went into hiding in Calcutta and then in Chandannagar; surrendered to the police on 28 June 1930; took part in the Dynamite Conspiracy; sentenced to transportation for life and was sent to the Andamans; released in 1946; joined the Communist Party and was arrested because the party was at the time considered an illegal one and served nearly ten years in jail in both dependent and independent India; was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1967; became president of the Biplob Teerth Chattogram Smriti;

oversaw the building of the Shaheed Surya Sen Bhavan in 1987.

Girish Ghose: The unbelieving playwright who became a devotee of Ramkrishna Paramahansa and his wife Sri Ma.

Gobindo: A first ranker who had been reserved for the second phase of the operation; helped the revolutionaries after the Battle of Jalalabad.

Gobindo-da: The man servant in Ananda Prasad Gupta's home.

Golab Babu (Gulab Singh): Ananta Lal Singh's father

Gopi Nath Saha (Gopi): Killed Earnest Day mistaking him to be Sir Charles Tegart and was hanged.

Haralal Choudhury (b. 1908, d. 1998): Joined Surjya Sen while still a student in Saroatali School; introduced Sukumar Bhowmik, Shourindra Dutt Choudhury and Sailesh Ray; headed the Mir Sarai, Kumilla and Feni zilas; distributed pamphlets outside Chattogram on the night of the CAR; accompanied Lokenath from Chattogram to Kumilla; was arrested in 1932 under the Bengal Ordinance; passed his BA and law exams while in jail; released in 1938; taught in various schools in both dependent and independent India; settled in independent India.

Haran (Shourindra Mohan Choudhury): Part of Railway line 1 wrecking team; his mama was the sub inspector who tried to search Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh, Jibon Ghoshal and Ananda Prasad Gupta at the Feni Railway Station, was shot and yet refused to identify Ananta Lal Singh in the police line up.

Harendralal Chakraborty: Took part in the attack on the cricket ground on 7 January 1934, led by Krishna Choudhury – a protest against the sentence passed on Surjya Sen; he was severely wounded during the encounter and arrested; hanged on 5 June 1934 in Midnapore Jail along with Krishna Choudhury.

Hari Gopal Bal (Tegra): Lokenath Bal's youngest brother; Ananda Prasad Gupta's classmate; he took part in CAR and died in the Battle of Jalalabad.

Hari Narayan Chandra (Hari-da): Taught the young revolutionaries bomb making; was incriminated in the murder of Rai Bahadur Bhupen Chatterji during a meeting at Alipore Central Jail; was arrested and tried along with Nadiya's Ananta Hari Mitra, Chattogram's Sukhendu Dutt, Dhaka's Birendra Chatterji,

Chattogram's Pramod Ranjan Choudhury and seven others; he and Ananta Chakraborty were sent to the Burma Jail to serve a life sentence.

Haripada Bhattacharya (b. 1914, d. 1993): Was a student of Saroatali High School; single-handedly killed Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla on 30 August 1931; underwent severe torture and was blinded in one eye; was tried by a judge and jury and was declared free to go; the case was sent to the High Court which sentenced Haripada to the Andamans; released in 1946 along with Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh and the others; settled in Siliguri in independent India.

Haripada Mahajan: The son of a wealthy family; was a part of the police lines attack team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; waited in hiding for eight months for Surjya Sen to send him a call, then left for Burma together with Bhabatosh Bhattacharya; fell ill and died in 1942 while still in Burma.

Helfferich: The contact in Batavia who was involved in the Indo-German conspiracy hatched during WW I.

Hemendu Bikash Dastidar (b. 1914, d. 1974): Was a student of the Chattogram Municipal High School and was in class 9 when he joined Surjya Sen's group; had picked a fight with Karunamoy over the debate topic 'The pen is mightier than the sword'; was a part of the police line attack team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; went into hiding and used the alias Boro-khoka, was arrested on 28th August 1932 while coming out of the mess at 130 Maniktala Street; was tried along with Ambika Chakraborty and Saroj Kanti Guha in the Supplementary Armoury Raid Case Trial and was acquitted; was rearrested immediately under the Bengal Ordinance; was released in 1938; settled in Chattogram which became a part of East Pakistan and then Bangladesh.

Heramba Bal: His Dodge could not be used for the CAR; was arrested and tried but was acquitted for lack of evidence.

Himangshu Bhowmik (Raja): Who killed a traitor.

Himangshu Bimal Chakraborty: Took part in the attack on the cricket ground on 7 January 1934, led by Krishna Choudhury – a protest against the sentence passed on Surjya Sen; he was severely wounded during the encounter and died in the hospital.

Himangshu Bimal Sen (Andu): Ananda Prasad Gupta's classmate; kept watch on Inspector Sharada Bhattacharya's house; took part in CAR and suffered fatal burns that night.

Horen Sen: Ram Krishna's friend.

Hriday Ranjan Das: Was Madhusudhan Guha's father's go-down manager; he had taken charge of the trunk that Madhusudhan (who was then out on bail in the CAR Case) had smuggled into the go-down; accompanied by Robi Sen, dressed in a sari, had visited Pritilata Waddadar's father and taken one of his properties on rent for the Dynamite Conspiracy; after Madhusudhan was arrested in the Dynamite Conspiracy, Hriday opened the trunk and discovered the landmines; he was in the process of burying them when he was caught by the police; was sentenced for five years of hard labour at the Andamans; settled in Chattogram and passed away in 1997.

Indumati Singh (modified later to Sinha) (b. 1900, d. 5 May 1967): Elder sister of Ananta Lal Singh and Nand Lal Singh; was connected with the revolutionaries since 1923; built up a women's group in 1928 and offered them physical education, training in martial arts and weapons training; put herself in charge of the fund collection drive to pay for the CAR case; helped in the Dynamite Conspiracy case; was arrested in Kumilla after the murder of Judge Stevens in 1932 and detained without trial for the next five years at Hijli; was a practising Homeopath before she was jailed; passed her matriculation exams while in jail.

Jadu Gopal Mukherji: Member of the Indo-German conspiracy hatched during WWI.

Jagadish Roy: Brother of Kalarpol martyr Swadesh Roy.

Jaitra Mohan Das: Haripada Mahajan's uncle.

Jashoda Ranjan Pal (b. 1900, d. 1928): Served ex lance naik of the 49th Bengal Regiment in the First World War; was amongst the first rankers who joined Surjya Sen's group in 1918; was responsible for weapons training; moved to Calcutta with a job in the customs office at Maniktala and worked with the Jugantar group helping to manufacture bombs; met Ananta Lal Singh and Ganesh Ghosh once again in Calcutta after the Paraikora Dacoity; was associated with Gopi Nath Saha who murdered Earnest Day in January 1924;

arrested in the Maniktala bomb conspiracy in 1924; sentenced for seven years to Dhaka Central Jail where he contracted tuberculosis and died in 1928.

Jatindra Mohan Sengupta (shortened to J.M. Sengupta or J.M. Sen; also referred to as Deshpriya): Defended Santosh-da; Surjya Sen and Ambika-da in the Suluk Bahar case; Premananda's case for the murder of Sub Inspector Prafulla Roy.

Jatindranath Das: Jatin Das of the Anushilan Party who worked with Bhagat Singh.

Jibon Ghoshal (Makhon) (b. 1910, killed 1 September 1930): A year senior to Ananda Prasad Gupta in school; forged his father's signature to withdraw money for the revolution, lent the family Essex to transport the burn victims – Tarakeshwar Dastidar and Ardhendu Shekhar Dastidar; drove the Dodge to the AFI armoury for the raid; came away with Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh and Ananda Prasad Gupta who were taking the burnt Himangshu Bimal Sen from the police lines to a safe place in the city and as a result was separated from the main group; took part in the Feni encounter; had chickenpox by the time he reached Calcutta; went into hiding in Chandannagar along with Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh and Ananda Prasad Gupta; was killed during the Chandannagar encounter on 1 September 1930.

Jitendra Mohan Dasgupta (Jiten Das): Payaj Kanti Choudhury and Pulin Ghose's classmate; took part in the CAR; died in the Battle of Jalalabad.

Jitendra Nath Lahiri: Part of the Indo-German conspiracy which was hatched during WW I.

J.K. Ghoshal: Jibon Ghoshal's father's elder brother; represented the revolutionaries at court.

Jogendramohan Gupta: Father of Deboprasad and Ananda Prasad Gupta.

Jogesh Majumdar (Jayadrath): Had been responsible for keeping Kali Kinkar safe; worked at the AB Railway Institute at Pahartali and had taken the responsibility of providing the signal for the attack during both the 1st failed attempt and the 2nd successful attack.

Jogesh: A responsible first ranker who had been reserved for the second phase of the operation.

Joteen Mookerjee (Bagha Joteen; Joteendra Nath Mookerjee; Jatindra Nath Mukherjee) (7 Dec 1879–10 Sept 1915): Part of the Indo-German conspiracy hatched during WW I.

Julu-da: See Nagendranath Sen.

Jyoti Prasad Gupta (called Chotkun by the family): Deboprasad and Ananda Prasad Gupta's youngest brother.

Jyotish Bhowmik (Jyotish-da): Who sent books to ALS at Alipore Central Jail.

Jyotish Ghose: Accompanied Subhas Chandra Bose, Deshpriya Jatindra Mohan Sengupta, and Nripen Banerjee to Chattogram for the Congress Assembly of May 1929. Ananta Lal Singh had met him in Calcutta soon after the Paraikora Dacoity in 1923. He remembers him as someone who read copiously. He is possibly the same person who inspired Gopi Nath Saha to kill Tegart.

Jyotsna-di: Ananda's Chhor-di.

Kali Kinkar De (Kali or Kali Kinkar) (b. 1910, d. 4 September 1989): Recruited when he was in class IX by his juniors from school – Pulin Ghose and Binod Bihari Dutt who took him to Kalipada Chakraborty and Surjya Sen in 1928; was a part of the police line attack team but had been sent off by Surjya Sen to inform the pamphlet distribution teams about the change in timings and as a result arrived after the police lines had been taken on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; after the battle he left the wounded Binod Bihari Dutt in the care of his sister at Fatehabad and went home where he found his parents had arranged a match for him; married Premlata; took part in the Dynamite Conspiracy but succeeded in evading arrest; took part in both the 1st failed attempt and the 2nd successful attack led by Pritilata Waddadar on the AB Railway Institute at Pahartali; carried a reward of Rs 1000/- on his head; was arrested in December 1933; shared a cell with Sudhindra Dasgupta at Chittagong Jail; sentenced to transportation for life at the Andamans; his wife Premlata committed suicide when she learnt of his sentence; described the last hours of Surjya Sen's life to the inmates of the Cellular Jail in the Andamans; released in 1985; settled in Chattogram which became a part of East Pakistan and later Bangladesh.

Kali Prasanna Choudhury: Ram Krishna Biswas' brother-in-law.

Kalicharan Ghose: The author of Rolls of Honour looked after Ananda Prasad Gupta and Jibon Ghoshal in Calcutta.

Kalipada Chakraborty (Kali or Pundit) (b. 1908, d. 1992): Joined Surjya Sen's group in 1923; was a Sanskrit scholar which earned him the name Pundit; was a part of the Telephone Bhavan wrecking team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; went with Ram Krishna Biswas to assassinate Mr Craig but killed Inspector Tarini Mukherji instead on 1 December 1930; was arrested and received a sentence of transportation for life and was sent to the Andamans; released in 1946; joined the Communist Party; lived on in Chattogram even after partition.

Kalpana Dutt (actually Kalpana Duttagupta but had shortened her surname to Dutt; called Bhulu by family; code names Rama and Anita) (b 1913 d 8 February 1995): Assisted in the Dynamite Conspiracy; absconded to join Surjya Sen's group but was arrested; absconded again while out on bail; escaped from the Gairala encounter; maintained meticulous notes on the preparation of explosives; was involved in the plot to kill District Magistrate HS Hands; was arrested after the Gohira encounter; tried along with Surjya Sen and Tarakeshwar Dastidar; sent to Hijli Jail; Rabindranath Tagore wrote to the governor requesting Kalpana's release in 1938; Reverend CF Andrews met the governor requesting her release as did Mahatma Gandhi; released in 1939; joined the Communist Party; married the Communist Party leader PC Joshi in 1943.

Kalyani Das: The elder sister of Bina Das. Started the Girl Student Societies.

Kamala Banerjee (later Mukherji) (b. 1914): Member of Jugantar; helped Kalpana Dutt during the Dynamite Conspiracy; was arrested towards the end of 1931 under the Bengal Ordinance; released in 1938.

Kamal-ud-din (b. 1910); Son of a farmer; joined Surjya Sen's group in 1930; realized that Ardhendu Guha, who was then out on bail, was meeting Surjya Sen in Sharat De's house and that the village had been surrounded by the army and the police, Kamal-ud-din rushed with the warning and took them into his own house hiding them inside the women's quarter thus saving them that day for Muslim homes were seldom searched; joined the Communist Party and lived on in Chattogram after partition.

Kamini Dutt of Kumilla: Advocate who represented a revolutionary in the CAR

trial.

Kanailal Dutta: Chandannagar lad who was a part of Barin Ghose's team; killed the traitor Narendra Nath Gossain within the jail premises and was hanged for the crime.

Kanchanlata: The Christian lady who acted as hostess to ALS, GG, AG and JG in Khidirpur.

Kazi Nazrul Islam: A poet famous for his spirited verses that encouraged the fight for freedom; settled in independent India after partition; was declared the national poet of Bangladesh.

Kebla-da: See Monoranjan Rai.

Khirod Mahajan: Was in the pamphlet distribution team

Khirod Banerjee (b. 1912, d. 1948): Lived in the Pahartali Railway Quarters; joined Surjya Sen's group in 1929; researched the AFI armoury before the CAR; was a part of the AFI armoury attack team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; was advised by Surjya Sen to leave Chattogram since he was not familiar with the local dialect; was arrested from Canning in 1935; was detained without trial for three years; died of tuberculosis in 1948.

Khirodprabha Biswas (b. 1888, d. 1996): The landlady at the Gairala shelter who looked after Surjya Sen, Kalpana Dutt, Shanti Chakraborty, Manilal Dutt and Brajen Sen; was arrested after the encounter on 16 February 1933 along with Surjya Sen and Brajen Sen; released in 1938; settled in Calcutta after independence and partition.

Khoka-da: See Monoranjan Dasgupta Khoka Sen - Ram Krishna Biswas' friend.

Khoka: See Deben De.

Khoka: See Deboprasad Gupta.

Khudiram Bose: Threw a bomb at what he thought was Mr Kingsford's carriage and ended up killing Mrs and Ms Kennedy in April 1908. He was a part of Barin Ghose's team.

Kiran Sen (b. 1915, d. 1998): Joined the revolution in its second phase; beheaded the traitor Zamindar Netra Sen on 9 January 1934, three days before Surjya Sen was hanged; he was helped by Rabindra Nandi; went into hiding in Rangoon; arrested from Rangoon and held without trial until 1938; his role in the murder was a well kept secret until independence; settled in independent India.

Kobi Nabinchandra Sen: An ICS officer who was penalised for writing in favour of independence.

Kobi: The Kobi; Gurudev are references to the poet Rabindranath Tagore.

Kobiraj Jayanta Dasgupta: Ranadhir Dasgupta's father.

Krishna Choudhury (b. 1912, hanged 5 June 1934): Was a part of the group that beat up Karunamoy for announcing the debate the 'pen is mightier than the sword'; had taken his uncle's rifle for the CAR and his uncle, who was a lawyer, had reported the loss of the rifle and the fact that his nephew was missing; took part in the CAR; participated in the Battle of Jalalabad after which his family sent him out of Chittagong to hide amongst the Chakma tribes; returned after two years and led the attack on the cricket ground on 7 January 1934 – a protest against the sentence passed on Surjya Sen; he was severely wounded during the encounter and arrested; hanged on 5 June 1934 in Midnapore Jail.

Kundaprabha Sengupta (Kunda; code name: Kobi) (b. 1917, d. 1990): Introduced by Mahendra Choudhury; sheltered Surjya Sen in her home in Sripur; kept the revolutionaries' writings hidden in her home; was arrested for being in possession of seditious writings and sentenced in 1934 to six months of hard labour; rearrested again under Shantrashbadh Virodhi Ain until March 1935.

Lady Macbeth: Code name for hostess at Jeshtapur shelter – Kutir.

Lal Mia: The signaller at Feni Railway Station.

Lal Mohan Sen: The son of a wealthy family; recruited by Ananda Prasad Gupta; led the Railway line 1 wrecking team; confessed during the CAR case and was the last to retract his statement; was said to have beaten up a convict overseer in the Chittagong Jail which led to a search of the jail; was sent to the Andamans and released in August 1945; returned to his home in Sandwip Island; was killed within three or four days of his return, while trying to stop a communal riot.

Lala Lajpat Rai: A senior Congress leader who died as a result of police brutality.

Lecturer: See Mani Dutt.

Lokenath Bal (called Shona-bhai by his younger brothers and sisters, Lokenath-da or Loka-da by his young friends) (b. 08/03/1908, d. 1964): Was the Students Union Secretary; led the AFI raid team on the 18 April 1930; was battle commander at Jalalabad, led his team out of the hills and met up with Surjya Sen's team; was arrested during the Chandannagar encounter; was awarded transportation for life and sent to the Andamans; released in 1946; joined the Radical Democratic Party and later the Congress Party; served as the deputy commissioner of the Calcutta Corporation; died suddenly of a heart attack.

Madhusudhan Dutt: Kept the party alive during the time the leaders were arrested under the 1924 Bengal Ordinance; worked as a contractor in Jamshedpur and sent his savings to the party; returned to Chattogram a few days before the raid and took part in the CAR; died at Jalalabad at the age of 24.

Madhusudhan Guha (Madhu): Was arrested in connection with the CAR case and released on bail; helped in the Dynamite Conspiracy; acquitted for lack of evidence.

Mahendra Choudhury (code name Zamindar, known to Kundaprabha as Mani-da) (b. 1912, d. 1988): Was a 9th standard student at the Chattogram Municipal High School when he joined Surjya Sen's group in 1929; had woken Suresh De by throwing roshogollas and then climbing up to his window; took part in the armoury raid; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; led the intelligence department of the revolutionaries; brought back the news of Nirmal Sen's death at Dhalghat; took part in the 1st failed attempt on the AB Railway Institute Pahartali; took part in the 2nd attempt on the AB Railway Institute Pahartali led by Pritilata Waddadar; tried to have Special Superintendent Nalini Majumdar killed but the plan did not work out; was arrested in December 1933 and detained without a trial until 1937; joined the Congress Party; settled in Calcutta after independence and partition.

Mahendra Lal Biswas: Sixty-year-old Mahendra Lal had offered Surjya Sen and the revolutionaries his home as a secure shelter after they returned from the Battle of Jalalabad; was arrested in 1935; had protested against the torture in the

jail and died with a few days.

Maklas Rehman: Worked at the AB Railway workshop; had been Ananta Lal Singh's neighbour nearly ten years ago had seen him at AB Railway Dacoity site.

Makleshwar Rahman: Was waiting to provide dinner for the revolutionaries at his restaurant on the night of the armoury raid.

Malin Bikash Ghose: Took part in the CAR and in the Battle of Jalalabad; was arrested but was set free after the trial due to lack of evidence.

Manilal Dutt (Mani Dutt, code name Lecturer) (b. 1915, d. 1992): Was introduced by Tarakeshwar Dastidar and Ram Krishna Biswas after the CAR; lived as a residential tutor in Dhalghat and took Surjya Sen and Pritilata from the Dhalghat encounter site to the shelter in Jeshtapur village; followed Surjya Sen's instructions and went into hiding; met Kalpana Dutt in Pritilata's house; helped Kalpana escape from the Gairala encounter by hiding amongst a stack of rice sheaves for a day before making it to safety; was involved in the plot to kill District Magistrate HS Hands; was arrested in 1933 for being in possession of a revolver and sentenced to hard labour at the Andamans; was released in 1945; settled in Calcutta after independence and partition.

Manindra Lal Guha (b. 1909, d. 1977): Was a student of BA at Chattogram College; took part in wrecking the Telephone Exchange according to Manini Chatterjee in Do And Die but according to Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930 -34 Aalokmela he had taken part in the police line attack; absconded on the 19th when he was sent back from the hills to contact Ananta Lal Singh and Ganesh Ghosh; was arrested on 25 December 1931 under the Bengal Ordinance and detained until 1938; he settled in Chattogram which became a part of East Pakistan and later Bangladesh.

Manindra Majumdar (b. 1904): Was Surjya Sen's deputy in Sripur and Haola; he was not amongst the ones that the police had an eye on; was a first ranker whom Surjya Sen had reserved for the second phase; his home on the banks of the Karnaphuli and was surrounded by coconut and betel nut palms and it was converted into a secret meeting place; during the time Ardhendu Guha was out on bail and working on the Dynamite Conspiracy, he would meet Surjya Sen at Manindra Majumdar's home; the garden served as the studio in which

revolutionaries, due to leave for their last action, were photographed; was a skilled sailor, helped Surjya Sen and Nirmal-da cross the Karnaphuli by night for the secret meetings and was mentioned as the one who would wait with the sampan during the proposed jail break; Ananta Lal Singh and Ganesh Ghosh's plan to kill Mr Craig had been discussed in this shelter and Ram Krishna Biswas and Kalipada Chakraborty detailed; arrested in May 1931 and held without trial until 1938; settled in independent India.

Maulvi Abdulla: a Congress Party worker who accompanied ALS to Calcutta.

Maulvi Makleshwar Rehman: The Kumilla zila Congress secretary who helped Ananta Lal Singh escape to Calcutta.

Mihir Bose: Lent his father's rifle for the CAR but did not take part himself.

Mir Ahmad Ali (b. 1915, d. 1973): Joined Surjya Sen's group while still a school boy and introduced several Muslim boys to the group; sheltered Surjya Sen and Nirmal-da in his own home; was extremely keen on taking part in the action but he did not get the opportunity; was arrested in November 1933 but his mother continued to shelter revolutionaries; was released in 1938; settled in Calcutta after independence and partition.

Mona: See Monoranjan Sen.

Monorama: Mother of Jyotsna, Deboprasad, Ananda Prasad and Jyoti Prasad, wife of Jogendramohan Gupta (called Rama by her husband).

Monoranjan Dasgupta (called Khoka-da by Kalpana Dutt): Joined Tarakeshwar Dastidar, Kalpana Dutt and Sudhindra Dasgupta at Gohira shelter the night before the encounter; was killed in the dawn encounter on 19 May 1933.

Monoranjan De: Arranged for the Gohira shelter and led the way; sounded the warning that the house had been surrounded; arrested on the day of the Gohira encounter and sentenced to four years of hard labour.

Monoranjan Rai (Kebila-da); (b. 1909, d. 1992): Was introduced by Tarakeshwar Dastidar in 1926; went into hiding in Calcutta after the CAR; introduced Pritilata Waddadar and Kalpana Dutt to Surjya Sen; took bombs across to Surjya Sen and helped in the Dynamite Conspiracy; was arrested in November 1930 and held without trial for seven years; joined the Communist Party and took part in the

Shramik Aandolan; was elected thrice to the West Bengal Vidhan Sabha.

Monoranjan Sen (Mona): First year intermediate student of Chattogram College; was part of the European Club attack team on the night of the armoury raid; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; preferred to commit suicide instead of surrendering in the Kalarpol encounter; his father, Rajan Sen, an elderly man and a pleader of Chattogram Court was kicked to death by Sergeant Kelly in the retaliation that followed the assassination of Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla.

Motilal Kanungo (Moti): Ananda Prasad Gupta's classmate; took part in CAR; died in the Battle of Jalalabad.

Motilal Nehru: A Congressman and the father of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Mr Peter's: A European who sold weapons to ALS.

Mrinalini Sen (b. 1917): Sister of Rajat Sen; lived with her parents in the Firingee Bazaar area; joined the volunteer vahini for girls in 1929 during the Congress Assembly in Chattogram; she and her mother, Binodini Sen, helped Kalpana Dutt and Ardhendu Guha during the Dynamite Conspiracy; kept guard with her mother when meetings were conducted in their house; was placed under house arrest in 1932; settled in Calcutta with her parents after independence and partition.

Nagendranath Sen (Nagen Sen; Julu-da): Served with the 49 Bengal Regiment in the First World War; was posted to Mesopotamia; amongst the first rank leaders in 1918; taught the revolutionists the use of weapons; led the Paraikora Dacoity along with Nirmal Sen; attempted to murder Tegart twice; was arrested on 27 March 1925 under the Bengal Ordinance, was released in 1928; married in 1928 and moved away from the revolution; helped Ananta Lal Singh hide in Calcutta after the CAR and Feni encounter; was arrested under the Ordinance and remained in jail from 26 September 1930 to 1938.

Nand Lal Singh (modified later to Sinha) (b. 7 Feb 1902, d. 27 July 1987): Son of Golab Singh and Rajkumari Devi; Ananta Lal Singh's older brother and Indumati Singh's younger brother; joined Surjya Sen's group in 1918; joined the Pahartali Railway Workshop as an apprentice and joined in the strike demanding better wages and benefits for the workers; married in 1925; stopped work as an active revolutionary but continued to help his brother and supported the movement; was arrested along with his father after the CAR; received hard

labour of 2 years for his part in the CAR; was rearrested under the Bengal Ordinance as soon as his term was over and was released in 1935; harassed by the government after the disappearance of Neta-ji Subhas Chandra Bose in 1941; was awarded the Tamrapatra in recognition of services in the cause for freedom in 1975.

Narain Chandra Roy (doctor): Looked after Ananta Lal Singh in Chandannagar; manufactured bombs used in Dalhousie Square bomb blast which targeted Sir Charles Tegart; sentenced to transportation for life to the Andamans; took with him trunks full of books to educate the youngsters serving their time in the Andamans.

Narayan Sen (Anath Rai) (b. 1912, d. 1956): Was a part of the police line attack team; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; went into hiding for the next eighteen years living in disguise under the noses of the police in Calcutta.

Naren Das: Was in the pamphlet distribution team after Pritilata successfully carried out the Pahartali Club raid.

Naren Dutt: Kamini Dutt's youngest brother and the owner of Bengal Immunity Ltd.

Narendranath Bhattacharya (C. Martin, M.N. Roy): Part of the Indo-German conspiracy during WW I.

Naresh Ray: Was a youth from Mymensingh who graduated from Chittagong Medical College; was Bidhu Bhattacharya's best friend; took part in the CAR; was in the team that had gone to attack the European Club; died at Jalalabad.

Nawab Mincha: Was the youngest Muslim revolutionary and was introduced by Maulvi Mir Ahmad; lured the police agent Paresh Gupta to a place where he was murdered by Amulya Acharya; was sentenced to two years of hard labour.

Nayantara Devi: Was Ram Krishna Biswas' mother.

Nepal Dastidar (b. 1911, d. 1994): Helped the absconders during the second phase of the revolution; took responsibility of the weapons; was arrested in 1934 and sentenced to hard labour at the Borstal; released in 1937; took part in the Bharat Chhoro Aandolan; lived on in Chattogram and took part in Bangladesh's independence movement.

Netra Sen: Zamindar of Gairala village who betrayed Surjya Sen, and the older brother of Brajen Sen. Was beheaded by Kiran Sen.

Nibaran Ghose (b. 1915, d. 1998): Was introduced by Kalipada Chakraborty; helped Kalpana carry nitric acid from Calcutta to Chittagong; laid the landmines in the Dynamite Conspiracy and was arrested while carrying explosives after a night's work on 3 June 1931; was sentenced to hard labour and released in 1938; lived on in Chattogram which became a part of East Pakistan and then Bangladesh.

Nibedita Guha: (b. 1920) in, she grew up in her maternal grandfather's house in Bhatikhain village, Chittagong. She was introduced to the movement by Sudhindra Das and helped hide proscribed literature in the house as well as arranged for shelters for Kalpana Dutt and others. From 30 September 1932 to February 1933 she was kept under house arrest. She later married Ardhendu Guha.

Niranjan Rai (b. 1914): Was a part of the Telephone Bhavan wrecking team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; returned to his village home and was not arrested for he was never seen as a suspect by the police; left for Rangoon sometime later and lived on there until he passed away.

Niranjan Sengupta: Ganesh Ghosh's friend from Anushilan who spent time with Surjya Sen in jail; was arrested in the Mechhua Bazaar case.

Nirendralal Bhattacharya: A schoolboy from Saroatali High School; was arrested in 1933 on the charge of carrying messages; committed suicide after two years in Hijli Jail.

Nirmal Lala: Fourteen-year-old from Cox's Bazar; took part in CAR; the youngest martyr of Jalalabad; was introduced by Bidhu Bhushan Sen; was unknown to most people which included his colleagues; when he was hit, his compatriots had called to Surjya Sen saying a little boy has fallen; the photograph of his dead body was identified as that of Sudhangshu Bose's by Sudhangshu's father and uncle while Sudhangshu escaped to Burma.

Nirmal Sen (b. 1900, killed 13 June 1932): Led Paraikora Dacoity along with Julu-da; stayed in Suluk Bahar house but missed taking part in the AB Railway Dacoity; was arrested under the BCLA in 1925 and was released on 27 November 1926; was one of the five leaders in CAR; led the AFI raid team on

the night of 18 April 1930; took part in Jalalabad; was killed in the Dhalghat Encounter.

Nirmal Sen: A revolutionary from the city. Not the Nirmal Sen who was amongst the leaders.

Nishi Chandra De: Kali Kinkar De's kaka; lived in a two storeyed mud house surrounded by a fruit trees close to a large pukur; worked at the Pahartali Railway workshop; had iron bomb shells cast at the railway workshop and turned his house into a factory where he manufactured landmines to be used in the Dynamite Conspiracy; his house was raided by a large contingent of armed police led by Mr Hicks, Khan Sahib Ahsanulla and DIG Mr Wright on 3 June 1931; of the five revolutionaries who were at work inside, Kali Kinkar De and Apurva Sen succeeded in breaking through the cordon and escaping while Nishi De, Ardhendu Guha, Sushil Sen and Prafulla Mallick were arrested; Nishi De was acquitted by the special tribunal; lived on in Chattogram after partition.

Nitaipada Ghose (Nitai) (b. 1914, d. 1972): His father worked in the AB Railway; lived close to the AFI and with four companions walked to the site of attack on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; returned to Jessore on Surjya Sen's instructions; was arrested in May 1930 in connection with the CAR Case; was acquitted for lack of evidence; rearrested immediately under the Bengal Ordinance and detained for the next five years.

Nityananda Gopal: The witness who had given an accurate description of Gopi Nath Saha to the police.

Nityaranjan Sen: Took part in the attack on the cricket ground on 7 January 1934, led by Krishna Choudhury – a protest against the sentence passed on Surjya Sen; flung a bomb which exploded close to Police Superintendent Mr Cleary; he was killed during the encounter.

Nivedita Choudhury (later Guha) (b. 1920): Was influenced by her uncle Sudhindra Das and hid the groups' seditious literature in her house; arranged for shelters for Kalpana Dutt and other absconders; was placed under house arrest from 30 October 1932 to February 1933; married Ardhendu Guha in 1943; joined the Communist Party; travelled on two occasions with her children, carrying arms to Calcutta for Ananta Lal Singh and Ganesh Ghosh who had just been released.

Noni Das: Helped Kalpana in Dynamite Conspiracy case once Ardhendu Guha was held back in jail.

Noni Dutt (Noni-da): Advocate Kamini Dutt's son.

Noni Gopal Deb (Noni) (b. 1913, d. 1986): His father worked with the AB Railway and Noni lived with his father at Double Mooring; he was a class ten student when he took part in the police line attack on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; returned to Kumilla; was arrested in May 1930, tried in the CAR case and was acquitted; was rearrested immediately under the Bengal Ordinance and released in 1938; settled in Agartala in independent India.

N.R. Dasgupta: A lawyer who represented the revolutionaries at court.

Nripa Gopal: Was involved in the fight with Karunamoy over the topic of the school debate 'the pen is mightier than the sword'.

Nripen Banerjee: A senior politician; the vice principal of Chittagong Government College and related to Suhashini Ganguli (Putudi); attended the Congress Assembly in Chittagong in 1929; investigated the riots along with Deshpriya Jatindra Mohan Sengupta after the assassination of Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla.

Nripen: Plotted the assassination of Tegart along with Gopi Nath Saha.

Panchanon Babu: Helped out with shopping at Chandannagar.

Pannalal Sen (b. 1901): Took part in the first failed attempt on the AB Railway Institute at Pahartali; took part in the second successful attempt led by Pritilata on the AB Railway Institute at Pahartali; worked at Ram Chandra Singh's soda water shop on the banks of the Lal Dighi and maintained a liaison with the jail staff to help Surjya Sen escape from jail; was arrested on 15 July 1933 under the Bengal Ordinance and was released in 1938; settled in Assam in independent India.

Payaj Kanti Choudhury: Had resisted joining the revolution but had personally sought out Kali Kinkar De and asked to meet Surjya Sen after reading the names of his classmates – Pulin Ghose and Jiten Das, in the Jalalabad list of martyrs; assumed responsibility for distributing pamphlets during the first failed attempt on the AB Railway Institute at Pahartali; distributed pamphlets after the second

successful attempt led by Pritilata on the AB Railway Institute at Pahartali; died after an interrogation by Captain Stevenson MIO.

Phonindra Nandi (Phoni) (b. 1911, died 1940 in jail): Amarendra Nandi's cousin; was a part of the AFI raid team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; had gone with Rajat, Debu, Swadesh, Mona and Subodh to attack a club in the city but was arrested just before the Kalarpol encounter; took part in the Dynamite Conspiracy while in jail; received a life sentence and was sent to Andamans where he contracted tuberculosis; was brought back to Alipore Central Jail but despite Sarat Chandra Bose's attempts, he was denied release and proper medical treatment; died in Alipore Central Jail in 1940.

Prabhat Ranjan Dutt (b. 1914, d. 1978): Introduced by Ram Krishna Biswas; his home served as a weapons store; helped Kalpana with the Dynamite Conspiracy case once Ardhendu was held back in jail; helped lay the mines; was arrested and sent to the Midnapore Jail; helped Dinesh Majumdar escape from Midnapore Jail; was rearrested under the Bengal Ordinance as soon as his time was up and moved to Hijli; was released in 1937 and settled in Calcutta in independent India.

Prafulla Babu: Taught young revolutionaries swimming.

Prafulla Pathak: Ticket collector at Feni Railway Station.

Prafulla Ranjan Das (Gamma) (b. 1915): Was a part of the first failed attempt on AB Railway Institute at Pahartali led by Shaileshwar Chakraborty; was a part of the second attack on the AB Railway Institute at Pahartali raid led by Pritilata Waddadar; was arrested on 12 March 1933 under the Bengal Ordinance and released in 1938.

Prafulla Ranjan Mallick (b. 1911): Introduced by Kali Kinkar De; was a part of the pamphlets distribution team on the night of the CAR; retrieved the weapons hidden in a pukur in the forests by Surjya Sen's group; laid the landmines and was arrested on 4 June 1931 from the house of Kali Kinkar De in connection with the Dynamite Conspiracy Case; sentenced to hard labour; released in 1937; lived on in Chattogram until his death.

Pramod Dasgupta: Laid the landmines in the Dynamite Conspiracy.

Pramod Ranjan Choudhury (b. 1900, hanged September 1926): Introduced

Ananta Lal Singh to Surjya Sen and was amongst the first rankers in the group formed in 1918; moved to Anushilan along with Charu Bikash Dutt; was a part of the dacoity in Chattogram's Noapara zila; while arrests were being carried out under the Bengal Ordinance of 1924, he escaped with Surjya Sen to Calcutta; on 10 November 1925 he, along with Ananta Chakraborty and Rakhal De, helped Surjya Sen escape from a police raid on the house in Shobha Bazaar before they were themselves arrested; murdered Rai Bahadur Bhupen Chatterji during a meeting at Alipore Central Jail and was tried along with Chattogram's Sukhendu Dutt, Dhaka's Birendra Chatterji, Ananta Hari Mitra and others; was hanged along with Ananta Hari Mitra.

Pranhari Das: Zamindar of Kattali village, father of musician Suren Das, gave refuge to Lokenath's group after the Battle of Jalalabad.

Prasanna Talukdar (b. 1889): Landlord at the Gohira village shelter; brother of Purno Talukdar who was killed in the encounter; was injured in the encounter and arrested; sentenced to three years of hard labour; lived on in Chattogram after partition.

Prashant Dasgupta (b. 1917, d. 2000): Was introduced in the second phase of the revolution by Dhiren De (most probably Biren De), who had returned from the Battle of Jalalabad; arranged for shelters for the absconders; placed under house arrest in 1933 and later made to leave Chattogram; settled in independent India.

Pratul Babu: Old time revolutionary who was excluded from Surjya Sen's group.

Pratul Bhattacharya: An Anushilan Party member and GG's friend.

Pravin-da: Old time revolutionary who was excluded from Surjya Sen's group.

Premananda Dutt: Responded to C.R. Das' call and left his job to take part in the Ashahjog Aandolan for which he was arrested; supported the AB Railway workers' strike in 1921; was introduced by Ananta Lal Singh to the revolutionary group; took part in the Paraikora Dacoity; betrayed Ananta Lal Singh and then regretting the action murdered Sub Inspector Prafulla Roy; was acquitted but re arrested under the Bengal Ordinance; eventually lost his mind and was sent off to the asylum in Ranchi where he died.

Premlata: Kali Kinkar De's first wife whom he called Priti; she took part in the Dynamite Conspiracy; learnt how to fire a revolver but was sent back after

Kalpana Dutt's arrest; committed suicide when she learnt her husband had been sentenced for life to the Andamans.

Pritilata Waddadar (code name Rani) (b. 5 May 1911, committed suicide 24 September 1932): One of her father's properties was used for manufacturing explosives for the Dynamite Conspiracy; was present at Dhalghat the day it was raided on 13 June 1932; became head mistress of Nandan Kanan High School after the Dhalghat Encounter; successfully led the attack on the 24 September 1932 AB Railway Institute at Pahartali and committed suicide immediately afterwards.

Prohash Bal: Lokenath and Tegra's seventeen-year-old cousin; was recruited by Kalipada Chakraborty and forced to give up smoking; took part in CAR and went for the raid on the AFI armoury; died at Jalalabad.

Prodyot Bhattacharya: The juvenile involved in the murder of District Magistrate Douglas of Midnapore; was hanged at Midnapore Central Jail on 13 January 1933.

Pulin Bihari Majumdar: Assistant station master at Feni Railway Station.

Pulin Ghose: Known as Quick Silver the messenger; recruited Kali Kinkar De; took part in the CAR; drank lubricant out of desperation while trekking through the hills; held out a green mango as he lay dying on Jalalabad – one that he had saved for Lokenath.

Pundit: See Kalipada Chakraborty.

Purnendu Dastidar: Ardhendu Shekhar Dastidar's elder brother; along with Renu Rai and Kamala Banerjee, helped Kalpana Dutt procure nitric acid in Calcutta.

Purno Talukdar: Fifty-year-old landlord at the Gohira village shelter, killed during the encounter on 19 May 1933.

Pushpo Kuntala Devi (Pushpo Boudi): Surjya Sen's wife.

Rabindra Nandi (Khoka) (b. 1916): Accompanied Kiran Sen on the mission to kill Zamindar Netra Sen who had betrayed Surjya Sen; was arrested in 1934 under the Bengal Ordinance; sentenced to two years of hard labour for disobeying jail rules; released in 1938; settled in independent India.

Rabindra Narayan Sen (Robi Sen) (b. 1910, d. 1989): A youth from Saroatali village who worked as a driver for Jibon Ghoshal's father; was a skilled electrician and a member of the Sadarghat Club; was recruited by Ardhendu Guha as per Ananta Lal Singh's instructions; supervised the electrical connections in the landmines; was a fresh faced lad and, dressed in a sari, had accompanied Hriday Das and approached Pritilata Waddadar's father to take one of his properties on rent; he was to wait at the appointed site with a truck on the day of the proposed jail break; was arrested in connection with the Dynamite Conspiracy and sentenced to hard labour for seven years; settled in independent India.

Rajan Sen (called Rajani Sen in Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930–34 Aalokmela): Kalarpol Shaheed Monoranjan Sen's sixty-year-old father; a pleader of the Chittagong court; he was kicked to death in his own house by Sergeant Kelly during the riots that followed Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla's murder.

Rajani Biswas: Ananta Lal Singh's neighbour and advocate, who advised him not to resist a search, the advice led to the arrest on 1 Oct 1924; represented the revolutionaries at court during the CAR case.

Rajat Sen: First year intermediate student of Chittagong College; a good footballer who used to play with the police teams; a good artist – Sir Stanley Jackson had once offered to recommend him for admission to art college; nearly as powerfully built as Lokenath Bal; his house served as a training centre; was a part of the AFI raid team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; preferred to commit suicide instead of surrendering in the Kalarpol encounter.

Rajen Das: A man as old as Surjya Sen, who harangued him for not doing enough work and got frightened when Ananta Lal Singh put him through a test at night.

Rajendra Kumar Dasgupta (Rajen Das) (b. 1903): Stayed in Suluk Bahar house and took part in AB Railway Dacoity; during the Nagarkhana hill battle he consumed the same spurious cyanide that Surjya Sen and Ambika Chakraborty had consumed; regained consciousness at night and found himself lying in an obscure part of the hill; went home and went into hiding; was arrested on 16 February 1925 under the Bengal Ordinance; lost his mental balance after being tortured in jail and was released on 25 September 1928.

Rakhal De (b. 1901): A friend of Surjya Sen's students Sukumar Biswas and Dalil Rehman; was arrested, along with Ananta Chakraborty and Pramod Ranjan Choudhury, on 10 November 1925 from the Shobha Bazaar shelter after helping Surjya Sen escape; prosecuted in the Dakshineswar Bomb Case; was given life transportation for the murder of Rai Bahadur Bhupen Chatterji and moved between several jails, spending twelve years in the Andamans before securing his release in 1936; joined the Congress and led the Bhudaan Aandolan; settled in independent India.

Rakhal Sakha Basak: Took part in the Dynamite Conspiracy; gunpowder was made at his home.

Ram Krishna Biswas (called Ledu by the family): Younger brother of Sitaram Biswas who took part in the CAR and Battle of Jalalabad; was introduced to Surjya Sen by Tarakeshwar Dastidar; mentored Suresh De; made and put up revolutionary posters in the city; suffered serious burns while manufacturing percussion caps just before the armoury raid; went with Kalipada Chakraborty to assassinate Mr Craig on 1 December 1930 but killed Inspector Tarini Mukherji by mistake; motivated Pritilata Waddadar who came to meet him in jail; was hanged at Alipore Central Jail on 4 August 1931.

Ram Krishna Chakraborty: Minor boy who was arrested on 13 June 1932 along with his mother, Savitri Devi – the landlady at Dhalghat; was sentenced to four years of hard labour and moved to Midnapore Central Jail where he was made to work the oil mills; denied permission to meet his mother despite having contracted tuberculosis; died in jail in 1934.

Ramani Nath Banerjee (b. 1914, d. 2001): Was introduced by Ardhendu Guha; was responsible for planting two motor car batteries and connecting the lead wires to the landmines under the court building; was arrested in 1932 and placed under house arrest first in his Chattogram home and later in his ancestral home in Dhaka.

Ramen Bhowmik: Under the guidance of Saroj Kanti Guha he shot L.G. Durno, district magistrate of Dhaka,

Ranadhir Dasgupta (b. 1915, d. 1988): Had brought his father's rifle for the raid; participated in police line attack on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; was arrested and tried in the CAR case; was given transportation

for life but granted clemency; resisted his father's attempt to appeal and reopen the case; took part in the second hunger strike in the Cellular Jail; was released in December 1937–38; joined the Communist Party; settled in Calcutta after partition.

Ranjan Lal Sen: The father of Rajat Sen, a lawyer by profession.

Rash Bihari Basu: A journalist implicated in the attack on Lord Hardinge; escaped to Japan from where he continued fuelling the revolution.

Rashik Nandi: Amarendra Nandi's father

Ratneshwar Sheel (b. 1917): Was introduced by Binod Bihari Dutt in the second phase of the revolution; was arrested from his home in Durgapur and sentenced to hard labour under the Indian Arms Act on 6 September 1935; joined the Communist Party and settled in independent India.

Robi Sen: See Rabindra Narayan Sen.

Rohini Barua (b. 1915): Was a Buddhist by religion but believed in achieving freedom for India; was harassed by police while they were picking up suspicious youths but since there was no evidence against him, he was held without trial as a detenué; was moved from jail to jail and finally interned in a village under the Gwaland Thana. He was being constantly called to the thana and being harassed by the daroga. On 15 June 1935, Rohini drew a talwar and slew the daroga inside the thana; there was no evidence of his guilt but Rohini insisted on confessing and refused the advice to apply for an appeal. He was hanged on 15 December 1935 at the Faridpore Jail.

Sachin Sanyal (Sachindranath Sanyal) (b. 1873, d. 1942): Founding member of the Hindustan Republican Association, which after 1928 became the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association; was extensively involved in the Ghadr conspiracy and went into hiding in 1915; was tried and sentenced in the Kakori Conspiracy Case in 1925 and sent to the Cellular Jail in the Andamans; wrote his book *Bandi Jibon – A Captive Life*; died while in the Gorakhpur Jail.

Sachin Sen: Ram Krishna's friend.

Sachindra Prasad Sen (Maan-da) (b. 1909, d. 1980): Lived in Saroatali village; son of a Congressman who involved him in the Ashahjog Aandolan of 1922;

was a BA student in Chattogram College; carried weapons for Ananta Lal Singh from Calcutta in 1929; after the CAR and Battle of Jalalabad his house became a secret meeting place for the leaders; took part in the Dynamite Conspiracy and was made the area in-charge for Chattogram city; went into hiding, was arrested in December 1932 from Kumilla and detained under the Bengal Ordinance until 1938; settled in independent India.

Sahayram Das (b. 1913, d. 1991): Was recruited by classmates Sukhendu Bikash Dutt and Motilal Kanungo; was in the same class as Ananda Prasad Gupta; took part in CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; returned home but was handed over to the police by his own uncle; took part in the Dynamite Conspiracy; sang Bande Mataram in court the day Motilal Nehru died; transported for life to the Andamans; released in 1946; joined the Communist Party.

Sailendra Nath Ghose: The president of the Indian National Congress of America who threatened to have Gandhi replaced in case he backed down during the negotiations with the British.

Sailesh Ray (b. 1911): A new member of the Chittagong group introduced by Haralal Choudhury; was guided by Binod Bihari Dutt and carried out the murder of the police superintendent of Comilla, Mr Ellison on 29 July 1932; was caught outside Chittagong Jail while trying to arrange for Surjya Sen's escape; was sentenced for seven years to the Andamans under the Indian Arms Act on 25 May 1933; took part in the 38 days hunger strike while in the Cellular Jail; was released in 1940 and rearrested because of World War II; lived for a while in East Pakistan and then moved to independent India.

Sampad Choudhury: This nineteen-year-old was arrested in 1933 for helping absconders; died in 1934 while still in prison.

Sanjiv Dutt: Kamini Dutt's youngest son who lived in Shyam Bazaar Calcutta.

Santosh-da: Led the group that carried out the Shankharitola Post Office dacoity.

Sarat Chandra Bose (b. 6 September 1889, d. 20 February 1950): The barrister who came to defend Ananta Lal Singh; also the older brother of Subhas Chandra Bose; brought four freshly made hand grenades packed with TNT and 2000 Rs to Chattogram for Surjya Sen; helped rehabilitate some of the revolutionaries when they were released from jail; worked for reunification of Bengal and was the first to donate money into the fund being raised by Ananta Lal Singh; in a

signed editorial to be published in The Nation written half-an-hour before his death he appealed to the people of India and Pakistan: That East Bengal as a distinct and separate State should join the Indian Union and that the people of India and Pakistan should bring pressure to bear upon their respective Governments to bring it about as soon as possible. He further appealed to the Bengalis, both Hindu and Muslim, to abjure the cult of violence, restore sobriety and sanity, reestablish communal harmony; not look either Delhi way or Karachi way for the light would not come from there. Be guided by the light within was his last request to the Bengalis.

Saroj Bhattacharya: Was on the pamphlet distribution team on the night of the CAR.

Saroj Kanti Guha (b. 1912, d. 1985): Was introduced by Ananta Lal Singh; stole rupees 1000/- worth of jewellery that was being readied for a wedding in the family and handed it to Ananta Lal Singh; was sent as a trainer for Indumati Singh's physical education classes for girls; was a part of the police line attack team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; went into hiding and under Surjya Sen's directions, masterminded the attempt on Mr Durno's life; was arrested on 3rd August 1932 from the district of Noakhali; was tried along with Ambika Chakraborty in the Supplementary Armoury Raid Case Trial which began on 2 January 1933; sentenced to transportation for life to the Andamans; joined the Communist Party on release and settled in West Bengal in independent India.

Sarojini and Nalini Pal: The two sisters belonged to a wealthy family from Fatehabad and studied at Bethune College in Calcutta; they carried a trunk filled with twenty pounds of acid, on Kalpana's behalf, from Calcutta to Chattogram.

Sashank Dutt: Was an intermediate student at Chattogram College; took part in the CAR; died in the Battle of Jalalabad.

Sashank Mohan Choudhury (Madan) (b. 1919): Knew that Sailesh Ray, the tutor who lived in his house, had kept a suitcase with contraband goods in the study room; was seen moving the suitcase out of the house the night Sailesh Ray was arrested; was arrested and sentenced to three years of hard labour at the Borstal.

Sashi Bhushan Sen (most probably Sati-da): Amarendra Nandi and Diptimedha Choudhury were supposed to go from Badulla Hill and try to get in touch with

Sashi Bhushan Sen for news about ALS and GG.

Sasmal B.N.: A barrister styled as the pride of Midnapore; argued on behalf of ALS, GG and LB during the conclusion of the case.

Sati-da: See Sashi Bhushan Sen.

Satish Chandra De: Suresh De's older brother.

Satish Pakrashi: An Anushilan Party member; also GG's friend; was arrested in the Mechhua Bazaar Case along with Niranjana Sengupta.

Savitri Chakraborty (b. 1887): Hostess at Dhalghat who along with her daughter, Snehalata, and son, Ram Krishna, looked after Surjya Sen, Nirmal Sen, Apurva Sen and Pritilata Waddadar; was arrested after the raid on 13 June 1932 in which Nirmal Sen, Apurva Sen and Captain Cameron were killed and her house blown apart; her daughter turned Crown witness; her son died of tuberculosis while in jail; she refused to confess despite the torture; was not accepted by her relatives after she was released and lived as a destitute.

S.C. Mukherji: Represented the revolutionaries at court.

Shaileshwar Chakraborty: A youth originally from Cox's Bazar who was a BA student in Kumilla; took part in CAR and the Battle of Jalalabad; was a part of the original plan to kill Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla – he and some others were to lob hand bombs at the crowd and give Haripada the chance to enter the ring that surrounded Ahsanulla, but that day the plan failed and Haripada single-handedly shot the Khan Bahadur on 30 August 1931; led the 1st failed attempt on AB Railway Institute at Pahartali on 10 Aug 1932 and committed suicide that night; was given a hurried burial by his colleagues; he was nineteen-years-old when he died.

Shaileshwar: Was responsible for distributing the leaflets on the night of 18 April 1930.

Shankar: Had come to inform ALS when Ram Krishna got burnt; was responsible for making the Dui thaiya dui anna – two rupees two annas statement which became a joke in the group; was a part of the railway line 2 wrecking team.

Shanti Bhushan Nag (b. 1912, d. 1972): Was a Chattogram Municipal High School student and joined Surjya Sen's group in 1928; was a part of the AFI raid team in the CAR, his bullet struck Sergeant Major J.W. Farrell; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; helped Suresh De escape from the Jalalabad battle site and took him to his family home in Dhaka; was arrested in May 1930 from his own home in Kumilla; was acquitted for lack of evidence but rearrested immediately under the Bengal Ordinance and kept in jail for the next six years; settled in Agartala in independent India.

Shanti Chakraborty (b. 1914, d. 1943): Joined Anushilan Party as a student of class eight in 1930; was involved in the picketing of a liquor shop when he got beaten up by a police sergeant; retrieved the firearms that were hidden by Lokenath's team in a pukur after the battle of Jalalabad and handed them over to the Anushilan Party leaders; got in touch with the CAR absconders in 1932 and joined Master-da's group; took part in the first failed attempt on the AB Railway Institute at Pahartali; took part in the second successful attempt led by Pritilata on the AB Railway Institute at Pahartali; was called Doordeshi Dada or Shanti-da by Kalpana; was injured while escaping from the Gairala village raid; was arrested in 1934, tried under the Indian Arms Act and sentenced to hard labour in the Andamans Cellular Jail; joined the Communist Party on release; became ill and died in Chattogram Hospital.

Shanti Ranjan Sen (b. 1915, d. 1994): Was on the pamphlet distribution team during the first failed attempt on the AB Railway Institute at Pahartali; distributed the pamphlets during the second successful attempt led by Pritilata on the AB Railway Institute at Pahartali; was involved in a plot to kill H.S. Hands together with Kalpana Dutt and Manilal Dutt; was arrested on 24 September 1933; released in 1938; joined the Communist Party; settled in independent India.

Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay (Chatterji): A celebrated author of Bengal who wrote *Pather Dabi* a work that the revolutionaries read copiously.

Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay: Howrah Zila Congress President.

Sharat Kanungo (Naingta) (b. 1915): Belonged to a wealthy family and was not looked at with suspicion by the police; his house was used for nearly a year during the Dynamite Conspiracy; was arrested in December 1931 and held for five years.

Shashadhar Acharya: Member of the Jugantar party in Calcutta and a worker in Eastern Railway Howrah Department; took the responsibility of looking after four revolutionists on the run – ALS, GG, AG and JG; pretended to be married to Suhashini Ganguli and took a house in Chandannagar where the revolutionists were put up; was arrested on 1 September 1930; was tortured severely but could not be formally punished because the crime had been committed in the French occupied Chandannagar; he was held instead under the Bengal Ordinance for several years.

Shourindra Mohan Dutt Choudhury (called Dutt Rai by Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930–34 Aalokmela) (b. 1910, d. 1988): Was in Lal Mohan Sen's group that wrecked one of the railway lines on the night of the CAR; was arrested in May 1930 in connection with the CAR Case; was acquitted for lack of evidence; rearrested immediately afterwards under the Bengal Ordinance and was released in 1938; settled in Agartala in independent India.

Sitangshu Sarkar: The medical student who looked after Ananda Gupta & Jibon Ghoshal in Calcutta.

Sitaram Biswas (b. 1912): Ram Krishna Biswas' brother; took part in the police line attack on the night of the CAR; participated in the Battle of Jalalabad; went into hiding after Ram Krishna was hanged; was arrested in March 1933 but could not be tried due to lack of evidence and was detained under the Bengal Ordinance until 1938; settled in Delhi in independent India.

S.K. Basu: A lawyer who represented the revolutionists in the CAR Case.

Sripati Choudhury; (b. 1912): Was the son of a wealthy businessman; stole money from his father and gave it for the CAR; went into hiding in Akyab; was not able to make it back in time for the CAR; arrested on 27 April 1930 and released on bail; was acquitted due to lack of evidence; rearrested immediately under the Bengal Ordinance; released in 1937.

Srish Bose: Lawyer from Chandannagar who represented revolutionaries. Was christened Verbose by John Younie.

Subhas Chandra Bose (later known as Neta-ji): Younger brother of Sarat Chandra Bose, the barrister.

Subodh Bal (b. 1911, d. 25 December 1984): Joined Surjya Sen's group in 1929

while he was a first year student in Chattogram College; was a part of the police line attack team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; returned home after the battles and was arrested within a few days released on bail; was acquitted for lack of evidence in the CAR Case but was rearrested immediately under the Bengal Ordinance and detained until 1938; settled in Calcutta after independence and partition.

Subodh Chandra Biswas: Shouted slogans when ALS was brought to jail; was the first name on the case – Chittagong Armoury Raid Case No 1 1930 – The Emperor vs. Subodh Chandra Biswas and Others; was a part of the Dynamite Conspiracy; was acquitted for lack of evidence.

Subodh Chandra Roy (Subodh Roy or Jhunku) (b. 1915): Son of the prominent lawyer Ratul Kumar Roy and cousin of Kalpana Dutt; recruited by Nirmal Sen in 1927 at age 11; his father complained to the police that his son had taken his rifle without permission and was missing; took part in the police line attack on the night of the CAR; participated in the Battle of Jalalabad – describes the initial scene as: When I saw the Gurkhas with bayonets, I thought of shooting myself, then I thought I would not see my mother again (see page 112 of Do & Die by Manini Chatterjee); led Surjya Sen's group to his village home where they rested before dispersing; was arrested when he reached his home in the city; shouted slogans when Ananta Lal Singh was brought to jail; sentenced to hard labour in the Andamans but granted clemency on account of his age; released in 1938; joined the Communist Party; settled in independent India.

Subodh Choudhury; (b. 1910, d. 1972): Recruited as a Congress member by Tripura Sen and was hurt in the fighting during Congress meeting on 21 September 1929 and taken to hospital; was visited by Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh & Lokenath Bal; his home in the Railway Quarters was given as a correspondence address to the Mechhua Bazaar conspirators and was raided; brought dhutis to help cover Tarakeshwar Dastidar and Ardhendu Shekhar Dastidar while Ananta Lal Singh was driving around with them waiting for a shelter to be fixed; studied the AFI armoury; was a part of the AFI armoury raid team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; had gone with Rajat, Debu, Swadesh, Mona and Phonindra to attack a club in the city but was arrested just before the Kalarpol encounter; took part in the Dynamite Conspiracy while in jail; received a life sentence and was sent to Andamans; released in 1946; joined the Communist Party; was elected to the Vidhan Sabha three times.

Subodh Mitra (b. 1911, d. 1991): Was introduced while still a schoolboy at Feni by Haralal Choudhury; was a part of the Railway line 1 wrecking team led by Lal Mohan Sen; returned home to Feni that night; was arrested in May 1930 and tried in connection with the CAR Case; was acquitted for lack of evidence but rearrested immediately under the Bengal Ordinance; released in 1937; settled in independent India.

Sudhangshu Bimal Bose (b. 1912, d. 1988): Joined the group in 1928; was a member of the Sadarghat Club; was a part of the police line attack team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; his father and uncle went to court and identified the photograph of Nirmal Lala's dead body as that of Sudhangshu's; after about four years he went to Burma and joined up with Haripada Mahajan and Bhabatosh Bhattacharya; Burma was occupied by the Japanese in 1942 and the British fled, Haripada Mahajan died the same year; in 1945 the British retook Burma and offered to help the Indians in Burma return home. Bhabatosh and Sudhangshu took the opportunity; the families took a while to recognize them and in a few days they were taken to jail, however the situation was no longer conducive to carry out a trial and they were released; settled in Chattogram which became a part of East Pakistan and later a part of Bangladesh.

Sudhindra Nath Das (Sudhindra) (b. 1911, d. 1994): Joined Surjya Sen's group while a schoolboy; in the second phase of the revolution he helped with arranging shelters and collecting funds for the CAR absconders; was arrested in the Gohira village encounter along with Tarakeshwar Dastidar and Kalpana Dutt; shared the cell with Kali Kinkar De and replied to the letters Premrata sent; was sentenced to four years of hard labour; released in 1938; rearrested in 1942 for participating in the Bharat Chhoro Aandolan; settled in independent India.

Suhashini Ganguli (Putu-di) (b. 1907, d. 1965): Ex student of Bethune College in Calcutta, member of the Jugantar party; pretended to be Shashadhar Acharya's wife at Chandannagar and looked after Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh, Jibon Ghoshal, Ananda Prasad Gupta and Lokenath Bal; was arrested in the Chandannagar encounter; was arrested in 1942 for participating in the Bharat Chhoro Aandolan; arrested in 1948 for being a member of the Communist Party which was seen as an illegal party.

Sukhendu Bikash Dastidar (b. 1913, d. 1978): His younger brother's residential tutor was Ardhendu Dutt who was also involved in the revolution; looked after

Himangshu when he was burnt on the night of the CAR; was responsible for distributing pamphlets on the night of the CAR; returned after the distribution and waited near Ganesh Ghosh's shop to join the victorious revolutionaries and eventually went home disappointed; was arrested on the morning of 19 April 1930 while still in possession of the pamphlets; shouted slogans when ALS was brought to jail; was a proficient sampan sailor and was named as one who would help sail the sampan across the river during the planned jail break from Chittagong Jail; was given transportation for life and sent to the Andamans but granted clemency; released in 1946 and joined the Communist Party; settled in East Pakistan which eventually became Bangladesh.

Sukhendu Bikash Dutt (b. 1906, d. 1968): Part of Surjya Sen's group; left Bengal to build up the organization in Bihar and had been arrested in the Deogarh conspiracy; sentenced to hard labour for five years and was then detained in jail under the Bengal Ordinance; tried to help Surjya Sen escape from jail; released in 1938; joined the Congress.

Sukhendu Bikash Dutt: Ananda Gupta's classmate who had been stabbed during the September 1929 elections in Chattogram.

Sukhendu Dutt: Along with Dhaka's Birendra Chatterji, Chattogram's Pramod Ranjan Choudhury, Nadiya's Ananta Hari Mitra and seven others attacked and killed Rai Bahadur Bhupen Chatterji during a meeting at Alipore Central Jail; was tried but not hanged. He may or may not be the same Sukhendu Bikash Dutt who was arrested in the Deogarh Conspiracy Case and tried to help Master-da escape from jail.

Sukumar Bhowmik (b. 1913): Part of Railway line 1 wrecking team led by Lal Mohan Sen on the night of the CAR; arrested in June 1930; was set free after the CAR trial for lack of evidence; was rearrested under the Bengal Ordinance and released in 1938; settled in Agartala in independent India.

Sukumar Biswas: The nephew of Ananta Lal Singh's old colleague and brother-in-arms Premananda; one of Surjya Sen's students who had carried letters from Surjya Sen to his wife; had a restaurant in Calcutta; probably the one who betrayed Ananta Lal Singh to Tegart.

Sukumar Kanungo: Came into contact with the revolutionaries while they were in hiding after the Battle of Jalalabad. Was accidentally shot dead in 1931,

during a weapons training session and was given a quiet burial in the hills.

Sumati Majumdar: Ananda Gupta's aunt who gave him and Jibon Ghoshal money to escape to Calcutta.

Sunil De: Part of Railway line 2 wrecking team.

Suren: The farmer who had provided Ananta Lal Singh refuge

Suresh Banik (code name Pathik): his home was a shelter called Tapovan; was arrested for sheltering absconders; was sentenced to hard labour in Dhaka Central Jail where he contracted smallpox and was placed in an isolation cell where he died.

Suresh Chandra De (Sadhu) (b. 1911, d. 21 May 1990): Was a student of class nine in the Municipal High School when Kalipada Chakraborty introduced him to Surjya Sen; mentored by Ram Krishna Biswas; was a part of the police line raid team on the night of the CAR; injured in the Battle of Jalalabad; had a bullet in his arm and succeeded in escaping with the help of Shanti Nag; went into hiding in his family home at Dhaka; was arrested in January 1933 and held without trial for four years; settled in Jamshedpur in independent India; the boy who had no shoes during his youth founded Sreeleathers in 1952.

Surjya Sen (Surya Sen) (b. 22 March 1894, hanged 12 January 1934): Son of Rajmoni Sen and Sashibala Devi of Noapara village.

Sushil Dasgupta (b. 1911, d. 1987): Was with Surjya Sen, Kalpana Dutt, Mani Dutt, Shanti Chakraborty and Brajen Sen in the shelter at Gairala village when it was raided; succeeded in escaping; arrested on 15 August 1933 and held without trial until 1938; settled in independent India.

Sushil Kumar De (Sushil De) (b. 1908, d. 29 June 2000): Introduced by classmate Sarada Seel in 1923; was caught while learning to fire a revolver and arrested in 1928; was a part of the railway line wrecking team led by Upen Bhattacharya on the night of the CAR; returned to Chattogram that very night to join up with Surjya Sen and the revolutionaries but not finding them there went back to the village; was arrested but released after two months due to lack of evidence; helped the absconders and arranged to move them between secure shelters; was a part of the original plan to kill Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla – he and others were to lob hand bombs at the crowd and give Haripada the chance to

enter the ring that surrounded the target; was part of the first failed attempt on AB Railway Institute at Pahartali led by Shaileshwar Chakraborty; had found the Jeshtapur shelter which Surjya Sen had named it Kutir; was part of the second attack on the AB Railway Institute at Pahartali raid led by Pritilata Waddadar; was arrested September 1933 under the Arms Act and sentenced to seven years in the Andamans; protested against the treatment meted out to political prisoners; released in 1939 but was barred from entering Chattogram; joined the Communist Party in Calcutta and participated in the Shramik Aandolan; was re arrested in 1940 when WW II broke out under the Defence of India Act and released in 1942; settled in Chattogram but was imprisoned by the government of East Pakistan; moved to Agartala in independent India.

Sushil Sen: Was arrested and tried in the Dynamite Conspiracy Case.

Swadesh Roy: Member of Sadarghat Club; a contractor by profession; was not invited to join the revolution and had been rebuffed several times but still went to join them voluntarily on the night of 18 April 1930 when he heard the firing at the police lines; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; preferred to commit suicide instead of surrendering in the Kalarpol encounter.

Taracharan Baba: The sadhu who visited Chittagong.

Tarakeshwar Dastidar (Phutu) (b. 1904, hanged 12 January 1934): Became a part of the movement in 1924 when the leaders had all been arrested under the Bengal Ordinance; was introduced by Ardhendu Dutt to Ananta Lal Singh in 1928; introduced Ram Krishna Biswas; looked after Ram Krishna Biswas when he was burnt while making explosives; was a chemistry student at Chattogram College and was involved in manufacturing explosives; was burnt along with Ardhendu Shekhar Dastidar during an explosion in the Congress Office before the raid and as a result could not take part in the CAR or in the Jalalabad encounter; took part in the Dynamite Conspiracy; he and Biren De were chased by Detective Inspector Sashank Bhattacharya. Tarakeshwar killed him near Barma village; became the IRA leader after Surjya Sen's capture; surrendered at the Gohira village encounter on 18 May 1933; was hanged along with Surjya Sen in Chittagong Jail.

Tegra: See Hari Gopal Bal.

Tripura Sen: Was made a lieutenant in the Volunteer Vahini during the Congress

Assembly in Chittagong; was responsible for making sure all watches were synchronised on the night of the CAR; was a part of the team that went to attack the European Club; died at Jalalabad.

Umesh Singh: ALS's cousin in Tripura, who helped acquire arms.

Upen Bhattacharya (b. 1899, d. 1965): Stayed in Suluk Bahar house and took part in AB Railway Dacoity in December 1923; escaped from the Nagarkhana Hill battle site; was arrested in the Maniktala Bomb Case and released just before the Chittagong Armoury Raid; he was keen on taking part and was mentioned in the mobilization list found in Ganesh Ghosh's home after the raid; was a part of the Railway line 2 wrecking team and the telegraph line disruption team; returned to the city on 19 April 1930 to take part in the second phase but finding nobody he returned home; was arrested in a few days but was allowed to go within three months because of lack of evidence; maintained contact with Surjya Sen; was arrested in 1932 and held without trial for six years; settled in East Pakistan which became Bangladesh.

Basanta Kumar Bandhopadhyay: A resident of Gondolpara Chandannagar, who helped ALS, GG, JG and AG enter Chandannagar.

Vasant Majumdar: One of Kumilla's richest zamindars who helped ALS escape to Calcutta after the CAR.

Vijay Krishna Aich (b. 1913): Joined Surjya Sen's group in 1929; led the Railway line wrecking team number 2; walked back to Chattogram to join up with the army but finding them gone went back into the village; was arrested a month later and released due to lack of evidence; rearrested in September 1930 under the Bengal Ordinance and spent six years in various jails; settled in Calcutta after independence and partition and worked in the New Secretariat Building.

Vijay Krishna Sen (mentioned in Chattogram Yuva-Vidroha 1930-34 Aalokmela) (b. 1911, d. 7 May 1992): Was a part of the police line attack team on the night of the CAR; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; was not in the police eye and was able to return home safely; was arrested under the Bengal Ordinance in 1932 and detained without trial until 1938; settled in Agartala in independent India.

Vijay Kumar Sen: Took part in the CAR; participated in the Battle of Jalalabad

and is mentioned as a member of Group number 5 in Suresh De's list in Mukti Sapon Jalalabad; was in jail when Ananda Prasad Gupta was brought to Chattogram Jail and had been granted bail – mentioned in Ananda Gupta's list and in Ananta Lal Singh's list; tried in the CAR Case: acquitted for lack of evidence.

BRITISH CAMP

Ahsanulla (khan sahib): Arrested Ambika Chakraborty from Potiya; present at the Kalarpol encounter; honoured with the title of Khan Bahadur; killed by Haripada Bhattacharya after a football match

Ali Pande (sub inspector): Took part in the Kalarpol encounter.

Ali Rahim: The vice president of the Union Board who was a witness in the Kalarpol encounter.

Ayerst Lt.

Azim Abdul (sub inspector): Launched a hunt for Tegra, Tripura and Bidhu on 25 March 1930; hunted for Ram Krishna after a case was registered on his name under the explosive substances act; took part in the Kalarpol encounter.

Baker (major): Traffic manager during the time of the armoury attacks; became OC of the local unit of the AFI and led the attack on Chittagong as part of revenge for Ahsanulla's murder.

Banerjee Bimalpada: Chinsura police inspector who gave evidence in the Chandannagar case.

Barracough: The gunner who fired a Lewis gun from the roof of the Water Works building onto the police lines.

Bartley F.D.: Police officer who accompanied Tegart to Chandannagar; analyzed the Dalhousie Square Bomb Case.

Barua Jarasandha: District Magistrate Wilkinson's orderly who died on 18 April 1930.

Barua P.K.: Beat constable at Kalarpol.

Barua Pratul Chandra (sub Inspector): Was sent by Johnson to inform Wilkinson of the attack on the police lines.

Bennet: The handwriting expert.

Bhattacharya Sashank (Detective Sub-inspector Sasanko Bhattacharji): Killed by Tarakeshwar Dastidar at the Barma village encounter.

Bhattacharya Sharada (IB inspector): Warned Jogendramohan Gupta that his sons Deboprasad and Ananda Prasad were mixing with undesirable company; was threatened by ALS, GG, LB, Jibon Ghoshal and Naresh Ray and warned against picking on their group of boys; tried to influence Sarada Seel, Monoranjan Sen and, Bhabatosh Bhattacharya into becoming informers; was cross examined by J.K. Ghoshal and Sarat Chandra Bose during the trial.

Bhowmik Rohini (sub inspector): Tried to influence Sarada Seel into becoming an informer and took him to Inspector Sharada Bhattacharya's house; was present at the Kalarpol encounter.

Bhowmik Sachin: DIB officer who raided Rajat Sen's home.

Bikash Sukhendu: Public prosecutor's assistant in the CAR Case.

Blackburn (sergeant): Who discovered the AFI armoury being raided and ran towards Pahartali and was picked up by Police Superintendent Johnson.

Bliss: agent of the Assam Bengal Railway and the most prominent of civilians in Chittagong.

Bloomfield: European warder who helped smuggle explosives and material into jail for the Dynamite Conspiracy.

Bose Monoranjan (sub inspector): Went with Cameron to Dhalghat.

Buckland (lieutenant colonel): Posted to Chittagong to maintain peace and order.

Burke: Taitt's successor at the AFI.

Burman Braj Bihari (DSP): Police officer who led the Nagarkhana Hill battle.

Burnett Alexander: Tea planter and trooper in the SVLH who took part in the Battle of Jalalabad.

Burt: Superintendent of Narayangunj River Police.

Cameron (captain of the 2/8 Gurkha Regiment): Was killed at the Dhalghat raid by Nirmal Sen.

Cassells: John Younie's first boss in India who was shot and injured by a revolutionist.

Chatterji Basanta Kumar: Deputy superintendent in Calcutta; a bomb had been thrown in his house in November 1914 during a meeting in which Tegart was present; was killed by terrorists in 1916.

Chatterji Bhupendranath (rai bahadur): Special superintendent of police, Intelligence Branch in Calcutta, killed by the inmates of Alipore Jail during an official visit in 1926.

Chatterji Srigyan (Gyan Babu): Jail superintendent and doctor.

Chaudhury Lalit Mohan (beat constable): At Kalarpol.

Chrissie: The nanny who worked for the Younies.

Cleary M.F. (superintendent of Police, Chittagong): At cricket ground encounter.

Colson Lionel H.: Judged Donovan's gladioli as the best flowers in Barisal, deputy inspector general, Intelligence Bureau West Bengal; practised shooting with Tegart on the roof top; visited Chittagong in March 1930 and warned the police about an upcoming revolutionary uprising; interviewed ALS on his surrender; succeeded Tegart as police commissioner of Bengal.

Costello: Chief Justice in 1929.

Craig: Succeeded Lowman as IG Police and was Ram Krishna's target but

Inspector Tarini Mukherji was shot instead by mistake.

Cullen: A civilian in Chittagong

Cumming (Mrs): Her husband was in charge of the steamer service.

Das Jogendra (sub inspector): Present at Kalarpol.

Das S.R.: The advocate general who had facilitated the meeting between Tegart and Gandhi in 1925.

Day Earnest: Businessman killed by Gopi Nath Saha.

De Chandra Kumar (constable): Gave a statement in the Amarendra Nandi case.

De Umesh Chandra (DIB sub-inspector): Caught Sailesh Ray outside Chittagong Jail.

Denham Godfrey Charles: Sir Charles Tegart's colleague in the police service.

Deverell C.J. (lieutenant general): The officiating chief of army staff at the time of the CAR.

Dewan Siddique (sub inspector): Had accompanied Gaffur to the residence of Mr Johnson to give news of the presence of the raiders on Badulla Hill; another of Rajat Sen's football buddies; Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla's blue eyed boy and captain of the football team; attacked Haripada Bhattacharya after the murder of Ahsanulla.

Dey Prasanna K.: Kalarpol beat constable.

Donovan John: District magistrate and collector of Barisal; John Younie left his family with Donovan when he first came to Chittagong; congratulated Younie on the birth of his son; was on the terrorist hit list and was sent back to Britain; was a good friend of Sir Charles Tegart.

Durno L.G.: Was then the collector at Krishnagar; When district magistrate of Dhaka, he was shot by Ramen Bhowmik who had been guided by Saroj Kanti Guha.

Dutt Som: Jail superintendent at Hijli Central Jail.

Ellison: Police superintendent of Comilla was killed by Sailesh Ray.

Emery: Oecken's successor at the Imperial Bank; Burma golf champion in 1929.

Eric Hodson: The police superintendent of Dacca was shot and injured at the Dacca Mitford Hospital grounds in the same incident in which Lowman was killed.

Farmer J.C.: Was deputed to the IARO and made responsible for raising a Bengali regiment during WW I; was deputy inspector general Bakarganj range during the armoury raid; was with Police Superintendent Johnson on the roof of the Water Works building on the night of 18 April 1930; took part in the Battle of Jalalabad; was a part of the Kalarpol encounter.

Farrell (sergeant major): Was shot dead during the AFI armoury raid.

Farrell: A civilian in Chittagong; was amongst the civilians who met Mr Wilkinson at the Piccadilly Junction on the night of 18 April 1930; had dinner with John Younie and Ricardo Richardson in January 1932.

Ferera J.B.: the Anglo Indian guard on the train to Feni who pointed out ALS, GG, AG and JG to the police at Feni Railway Station.

Finney: A police officer who went to Chandannagar with Tegart.

Francis: Civilian who helped douse the fire at the AFI

Fullerton (vice admiral): On board the 'Effingham'.

Gaffur Abdul: A peasant who gave information about swadeshis being present on Jalalabad hill.

Garlick R.R.: District and sessions judge of Alipore Court who tried the Dalhousie Square Bomb Case; sentenced Dinesh Gupta of BBD trio to death for the murder of Col Simpson; was assassinated in his court. A letter accused him of the unjust hanging of Dinesh Gupta and was signed Bimal Dasgupta but the actual killer was Kanai Bhattacharya.

Gascoigne Julian: ADC to Stanley Jackson.

Ghose Asvini: The stationmaster who informed the police that four suspicious youths had boarded the train to Laksham on the night of 22 April 1930.

Ghose Heramba (inspector): Was present at Kalarpol.

Ghose Jogendra (constable), Was held by the revolutionaries at the Police Lines on the night of 18th April 1930 and was released just before the armoury was set on fire.

Goldfrap: The colonel of the Mahrattas commanding the military forces posted to Chittagong.

Gordon A.G. (DIG): Succeeded Farmer.

Gupta Dharendra Mohan: Deputy magistrate involved in the Kalarpol case.

Gupta Hem (sub inspector): Rajat Sen's football buddy; escorted the informer, who had news of the presence of revolutionaries on Jalalabad, to Chittagong to meet Mr Johnson; present at the battle of Jalalabad and helped with the cremation the next day; present at Kalarpol and gave an eye witness account at court.

Gupta Jogendra (DIB inspector): Kept an eye on Kalpana Dutt.

Haig H.G.: Home member of the government of India in 1933.

Hailey Malcolm: Governor of Punjab 1924 -1928; governor of UP 1928 – 1930.

Hallet M.G.: Home secretary in 1933.

Halliday Frank: Police commissioner of Bengal before Tegart.

Hands H.S.: District magistrate Chittagong who eventually saw the capture of Surjya Sen; a golf blue; had pressed for a fine of Rs 80,000/-.

Huq Abdul (Khan Bahadur): The Muslim member of the CAR Case tribunal.

Hardinge Lord: Viceroy of India 1910 -1916.

Hemmins: Witnessed the Dalhousie Square bomb blast.

Hicks V.W.F.: Became superintendent of police in Chittagong after Mr Wright committed suicide.

Hicks W.B.: Additional police superintendent; superintendent and jail super; later special superintendent. His initials have been mentioned as W.B. or W.V. Possibly he is the same V.W.F. Hicks who succeeded Mr Wright and petitioned the courts in the Supplementary Armoury Raid Case Trial as quoted in Mahanayak Surjya Sen Chattogram Biplob Pratham Khand page 180 by Ananta Lal Singh.

Hicks: Reached Pahartali club raid site led by Pritilata.

Hoare Samuel: Secretary of state for India.

Ila Devi: Princess, the eldest daughter of the Maharani of Cooch Bihar.

Irwin: Viceroy of India 1926–1931.

Jackson Julia: Wife of Stanley Jackson.

Jackson Stanley Francis (Jackers): Governor of Bengal from 1927 to 1932.

Janvrin: A police officer who went to Chandannagar with Tegart.

Johnson Jean: Wife of Police Superintendent J.R. Johnson.

Johnson J.R.: Police superintendent of Chittagong during the armoury raid.

Johnstone: A police officer who went to Chandannagar with Tegart.

Johur: John Younie's butler.

Kapur (major): New civil surgeon posted to Chittagong; John Younie and Captain Taitt seconded his membership to the club.

Keen (major): The officer commanding the 1/9 Royal Jats that carried out Gohira encounter in which Kalpana Dutt and Tarakeshwar Dastidar were captured.

Kelly (sergeant): Raided Rajat Sen's home; kicked Kalarpol Shaheed Monoranjan Sen's old father to death.

Kemm: Collector and district magistrate of Chittagong who succeeded Wilkinson.

Kennedy Angus (of 2/8 Gurkhas): Posted to Chittagong; went to investigate the Pahartali Railway Institute bomb attack site, the one that had been led by Pritilata.

Keywood (sergeant): Went with Tegart to Chandannagar; gave evidence in court.

Khan Subah: Sir Charles' Augustus Tegart's driver.

Khatri Kesh Bahadur (rifleman of 2/9 Gurkhas): Caught Brajen Sen.

Khatri Man Bahadur (rifleman of 2/9 Gurkhas): Caught Surjya Sen.

Khatri Nar Singh (lance naik of 2/9 Gurkhas): Caught Brajen Sen.

Kishori Babu (inspector of police): Let Lokenath go at the railway station.

Kumar Babu: Who took ALS into the IB office at 13 Lord Sinha Street.

Lahiri Narendra Nath (Rai Bahadur): the Hindu member of the tribunal that tried the Chittagong Armoury Raid (CAR) Case.

Le Brocq: A police officer who went to Chandannagar with Tegart.

Leishman A.R.: the president of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce.

Leonard: Officer of the Mahratta regiment posted to Chittagong; South India golf champion.

Lewis (ASP): Took charge of the revolutionaries on their way from Chittagong Jail to court and back, was part of the Battle of Jalalabad, the Kalarpol encounter and the vengeance wreaked upon Chittagong following the Ahsanulla murder.

Lodge: The district and sessions judge Chittagong during the armoury raids; he was succeeded by John Younie

Lowman Francis John: Inspector general of police who interviewed ALS after his surrender; was assassinated by Benoy Krishna Basu on the grounds of Mitford Hospital Dacca.

Lytton (Lord): Governor of Bengal before Sir Stanley Jackson

Macdonald Ramsay: Prime minister of Britain

Maitra: Dr Sheldon's second-in-command of bomb disposal

Majumdar Nalini, Rai Bahadur: Special superintendent no.3 of the intelligence branch; was a distant relative of Sukumar Biswas, the nephew of Premananda, and tried to influence him to betray ALS; ALS was brought to his office when he surrendered.; escaped an attempt to kill him during his daughter's wedding by refusing to come out of his room.

Majumdar Pulin Bihari: Assistant station master of Feni witnessed the interrogation of ALS, GG, JG and AG and their subsequent escape.

Majumdar Ramani (sub inspector): Took notes during the Congress Assembly in May 1929.

Martin (Mrs): Congratulated Younie on the birth of his son.

Matilal (havaladar): Led entire Potiya detachment of thirty-five sipahis for Gairala encounter in which Surjya Sen was captured.

McDonald (inspector of police): Present during Kalarpol; wounded in the AB Railway Institute Pahartali raid carried out by Pritilata Waddadar.

McKinty: Police officer at Calcutta who went to Chandannagar with Tegart; later intelligence chief of Bengal police.

Mills: Special Branch officer at Calcutta.

Minto (Lord): Viceroy of India 1905 – 1910.

Monk: Built the bridge over the Karnaphuli.

Mookerjee Rajendranath (Sir): Patron of the Bengal Flying Club who hosted the

inauguration lunch.

Moore Arthur: Supported the establishment of the Bengal Club.

Morsehead (sergeant): Who went into the AFI armoury on the night of the CAR and thought LB was Captain Taitt; narrowly missed being shot.

Mukherji Tarini (inspector): Mistaken for IG Police Mr Craig and shot by Ram Krishna Biswas at the Chandpur Railway Station.

Nag Sanjiv Chandra: The sub inspector of the reserve forces at the police lines who informed Johnson and Farmer of the attack; met Johnson, Farmer and Barraclough as they walked across the maidan to the Water Works building; the same line babu whose son had taken ALS and GG on a tour of the police lines.

Nangle: Officer of Eastern Frontier Rifles who took part in the attack on Chittagong as revenge for Ahsanulla's murder.

Nelson: Commissioner of Chittagong who investigated the riots that followed the assassination of Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla.

Nixon John: ICS officer who shared the chummery with Sir Charles Tegart.

Oecken: Played golf with John Younie.

Peddie James: District magistrate Midnapore who was murdered by Bimal Dasgupta.

Petrie David: Director of Criminal Intelligence in India. He was appointed head of MI5 by Churchill just before World War II.

Polly: Played golf with John Younie.

Prentice William (Sir): Chief Secretary; later home member of the executive council of the government of Bengal.

Provan: A civilian who helped douse the fire at the AFI.

R (Mrs): Wife of Ricardo Richardson.

Rahim Abdur (sub inspector): Verified information about the presence of

revolutionaries on Jalalabad hill; took part in the Kalarpol encounter.

Rai Jatindra Mohan (sub inspector) (Jatin Babu): Caught Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh; Ananda Prasad Gupta and Jibon Ghoshal at Feni; Haran's mama; was wounded by Ananta Lal Singh.

Rai S.N. (SDO): Came to visit ALS in Chittagong Jail.

Ramsbotham: Congratulated Younie on the birth of his son.

Rand: Poona's plague commissioner.

Rankin John (Sir): Chief Justice.

Rehman Fazlur (sub inspector): Of the Panchalaish Thana; was present at Kalarpol.

Reid: Commissioner of Chittagong who succeeded Nelson.

Reid: The chief secretary.

Richardson Bunty: Daughter of Ricardo Richardson.

Richardson Ricardo: Head of National Bank.

Robinson (captain): The commander of the Surma Valley Light Horse.

Rochfort: Played golf with John Younie.

Roxburg: The chief presidency magistrate.

Roy Prafulla (sub inspector): Who arrested ALS in 1924; was murdered by Premananda.

Sarkar Bhujang (inspector): Failed to recognize ALS as he drove out of the intelligence office at 13 Lord Sinha Street.

Satish Chandra Rai Bahadur: ALS's father's friend before whom Prafulla Roy gave his dying declaration.

Sattar Abdul (khan bahadur): Public prosecutor in the CAR Case.

Scott: The telegraph deputy superintendent who ran out with his rifle as soon as he heard of the attack on the telephone bhavan and telegraph exchange.

Sen Amarendra Nath (A.N. Sen): Who took over the post of judge at Krishnagar from John Younie; tried the Dynamite Conspiracy Case.

Sen Manmatha Rai Bahadur (Deputy Superintendent of Police): who offered the deal to ALS, GG and LB – there would be no hanging if they permitted the case to proceed and did not indulge in any more conspiracies.

Sharpe W. McC.: president of the tribunal, who with his colleagues R.K. Ghose and Khondakar Ali Taib, tried Surjya Sen, Tarakeshwar Dastidar and Kalpana Dutt.

Sheldon: The chief inspector of explosives.

Shooter B.J.: ASP at Chittagong; present at Battle of Jalalabad; instrumental in wrecking vengeance upon Chittagong after the assassination of Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla; committed suicide on 23 January 1932.

Simpson N.S. (colonel): Ex IMS, inspector general of prisons; was murdered by the BBD trio.

Smith Dallas (colonel): In Eastern Frontier Rifles.

Sovan Abdul: Sergeant Major J.W. Farrell's butler.

Spears: A mercantile marine officer who witnessed the Dalhousie Square bomb blast.

Spencer: Police officer who went to Chandannagar with Tegart.

Springfield (additional superintendent of police): Was in charge of the Intelligence Branch in Chittagong when Surjya Sen was caught; struck Surjya Sen on the chest with his revolver.

Stephenson Hugh: Governor of Bengal in 1925.

Stevens C.B.J.: District magistrate and collector at Comilla who was shot dead by Shanti & Suniti.

Stevenson (captain): MIO – the military intelligence officer posted to Chittagong; responsible for Payaj Kanti Choudhury's death; assumed full control of jail on the day of Surjya Sen and Tarakeshwar Dastidar's hanging.

Stork H.C. (judge): Was judge in Chittagong in 1923–1924; tried the Suluk Bahar Arms Collection case; with N.K. Bose and L.B. Das as part of the tribunal pronounced Dinesh Majumdar guilty; was president of the tribunal that tried Dr Narain Roy and, with his colleagues Ashutosh Ghose and Adiluzzaman Khan, found him a certain Dr B.C. Bose to be the most culpable.

Suhrawardy Hassan (lieutenant colonel): Knighted for saving the life of Sir Stanley Jackson during the Calcutta University convocation of 1931.

Taitt (captain): the adjutant of the auxiliary force of the Assam Bengal Railways during the armoury raids.

Taylor: Police officer.

Tegart Charles Augustus (5 Oct 1881–6 April 1946): Served as police commissioner of Bengal; joined the council of the secretary of state for India till 1937; was made a KCIE during the coronation honours in May 1937; refused the appointment as inspector general of police in Palestine and agreed to work in a free-lance capacity with Sir David Petrie; re organized the CID, created the Rural Mounted Police force, the barbed wire entanglement in the form of a fence running the length of the frontier road with an electrified detector wire throughout and concrete pill-boxes placed at strategic points along the fence – the Tegart Wall and the Tegart Forts; returned to Britain and personally appealed to the Irish to support Britain in WW II; accepted a job in the ministry of supply and worked along with Sir John Nixon during the War; took charge of the ministry of food's anti black-market campaign during the War and found himself disgusted at the low standards of honesty generally prevailing in the country; created an intelligence bureau and selected his own personal staff which included Lionel Colson and targeted the big conspiracies that were robbing the nation of food; went on sick leave some weeks after VE Day, suffered the first of a series of heart attacks which eventually proved fatal, still looked forward to complete recovery and resigned two months before his death only because the bureau could not be left without a head.

Tegart Edward: Sir Charles' Augustus Tegart's brother.

Tegart Kathleen Francis: Wife of Police Commissioner Sir Charles Augustus Tegart.

Tegart Robert: Sir Charles' Augustus Tegart's brother.

Thapa Birman: District Magistrate Wilkinson's driver.

Thomas: A civilian who helped douse the fire at the AFI.

Todd R.D. (sergeant of the Calcutta Mounted Police): Gave evidence on the Chandannagar case in court.

Tyers: A civilian who helped douse the fire at the AFI.

Victor Sassoon: Gifted a gypsy moth to the Bengal Flying Club.

Villiers Edward: President European Association, India; shot at by Bimal Dasgupta.

Wasid Abdul Mohammad Fazal (Inspector): Police inspector who caught ALS, GG, JG and AG at Feni Railway Station.

Waterworth: Police officer who went to Chandannagar with Tegart.

Waumsley T.H.: Captain of the 2/9 Gurkhas; captured Surjya Sen.

Weale: Police officer who went to Chandannagar with Tegart.

Wedgewood Benn: Secretary of state for India.

Weldon (Dr): Civil surgeon of Chittagong.

West: A civilian who helped douse the fire at the AFI.

White: Head of the PWD.

Wighton: A civilian in Chittagong.

Wigram Kenneth: Chief of general staff of the British Indian Army.

Wilkinson H.R.: Collector and district magistrate of Chittagong during the CAR.

Williams A.deC.: District and sessions judge of Chittagong who succeeded John Younie; tried Ambika Chakraborty.

Williamson H.: Intelligence bureau chief in 1933.

Willingdon Freeman-Thomas, 1st Marquess of Willingdon: Viceroy of India 18 April 1931 – 18 April 1936; Lord Irwin's successor to post of viceroy of India.

Woods (major): Helped Colonel Buckland maintain order in Chittagong after the CAR.

Wright (police superintendent): Who relieved Johnson; committed suicide soon thereafter.

Wright: The European warder who helped smuggle explosives and material into jail for the Dynamite Conspiracy.

Yates (captain of Assam Rifles): Was a part of the attack on Chittagong as part of revenge for Ahsanulla's murder.

Younie Dorothy: Wife of John Younie and a doctor by profession.

Younie Elspet Margaret: Daughter of John and Dorothy Younie.

Younie Helen: Daughter of John and Dorothy Younie.

Younie John (5 April 1893 – 9 Sept 42): District and sessions judge of Chittagong and the president of the tribunal trying the CAR Case; posted to Darjeeling where he tried the Lebong Case; posted as district and sessions judge of Jessore, Sylhet and Assam; decided to retire from India and settle in Scotland in 1937 but found it difficult to find employment and agreed to return to India to complete the remaining two years of his Indian service; was posted as additional district and sessions judge of 24 Parganas Alipore, Calcutta in 1939; district and sessions judge Comilla and Dhaka in 1941; became secretary judicial department and remembrancer of legal affairs Calcutta in 1942; died in Calcutta of dengue fever after a full day at work.

Younie Mary: Daughter of John and Dorothy Younie.

TIMELINE:

9 September 1915: Battle of Balasore. Joteen Mookerjee is martyred.

1919: Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar.

1921: Gandhi's Non Cooperation Movement

1919–1924: Khilafat Movement – a pan Islamic movement is launched by the Ottomans. Gandhi supports the movement in India.

1923: Charles Tegart accepts post of police commissioner of Bengal.

1923: Paraikora Dacoity takes place.

December 1923: AB Railway Dacoity followed by the Nagarkhana Hill Battle. Surjya Sen and Ambika Chakraborty are arrested from the site and charged with Suluk Bahar House Collection of Arms Case and the Nagarkhana Hill Battle. Ananta Lal Singh escapes. He is charged with the AB Railway Dacoity Case.

12 January 1924: Gopi Nath Saha shoots Earnest Day in Calcutta mistaking him for Tegart.

Early 1924: Ananta Lal Singh is arrested by Sub Inspector Prafulla Roy.

24 May 1924 – Chattogram Sub Inspector Prafulla Roy is murdered by Premananda.

1924: Surjya Sen, Ambika Chakraborty and Ananta Lal Singh are acquitted.

1st October 1924: The secret Ordinance comes into affect. Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh and Ambika Chakraborty are amongst those (Subhas Bose in Calcutta is also amongst the lot) that are picked up from home and thrown into jail. Nirmal Sen is arrested in July 1925.

25th of June 1925: Gandhi and Tegart hold a private meeting.

1926: Tegart receives knighthood.

8 Oct 1926: Surjya Sen is arrested and moved around between the jails on the west coast of India.

1928: Surjya Sen, Ambika Charan Chakraborty; Nirmal Sen, Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh; and Charu Bikash Dutt are released from jail.

30 October 1928: Protest march against the Simon Commission in Lahore.

17 November 1928: Lala Lajpat Rai dies after being beaten up by Superintendent of Police J.A. Scott during the protest march of 30 October 1928.

17 December 1928: Murder of Deputy Superintendent of Police J.P. Saunders.

29 December 1928: The 44th session of the Indian National Congress is held.

2 February 1929: Sir Stanley Jackson inaugurates the Bengal Flying Club.

February 1929: A congress committee is formed in Chattogram with Mohim Chandra Das as president and Surjya Sen as secretary. A youth congress is formed with Ganesh Ghosh as secretary; a students' union with Lokenath Bal as secretary. Ananta Lal Singh is appointed instructor to various gymnasiums.

8 April 1929: Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt throw harmless bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly.

April 1929: Tegarts and Jacksons holiday in Darjeeling. Tegarts go to Britain for a long holiday soon after.

11th, 12th and 13th of May 1929: Congress Assembly, Youth Assembly and Student Women's assembly is held. The Chattogram Volunteer Vahini puts up a show. Subhas Chandra Bose meets Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh and Tripura Sen secretly. On the last day there is a fight and a police complaint is filed against Ananta Lal Singh, Lokenath Bal, Naresh Ray and Tripura Sen under section 147 of the IPC. It is scheduled to be heard on 23 Oct 1929.

12 June 1929: Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt are sentenced to transportation for life for throwing bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly. The breaking news is that Bhagat Singh is being implicated in the murder of

Superintendent of Police J.P. Saunders and a new trial is about to begin. Jatin Das is arrested in the next couple of days.

13 September 1929: Jatin Das dies.

21 September 1929: Elections are held in Chittagong. Sukhendu is stabbed by goons on the day the results are declared. Surjya Sen and his boys leave for Calcutta to prepare for the BPCC elections

23 October 1929: Ananta Lal Singh returns from Calcutta to attend the hearing in Chittagong. He is sentenced to 4 months in jail and has 6 months time to present himself at the jail. He returns to Calcutta and appeals to the Calcutta High Court.

November: BPCC Elections are held in Calcutta. Subhas Bose wins by a narrow margin defeating J.M. Sengupta as Congress chief. Motilal Nehru orders a detailed inquiry. BPCC elections have to be re-held and completed before the AICC meeting on 21 March 1930.

15 October 1929: Pledge taken – DO AND DIE.

December 1929: Tegarts are back in India.

22 February 1930: A fight with Karunamoy Dutt of Municipal School takes place. The police name Tegra, Tripura and Bidhu Bhattacharya as the conspirators. Ananta Lal Singh and Ganesh Ghosh force the boys to turn themselves in.

On 7 March 1930: Ananta Lal Singh reports to jail. His appeal to Calcutta High Court comes through and he is released on 14 March 1930.

12 March 1930: Gandhi begins his Satyagraha Movement.

14 March 1930: Ram Krishna Biswas suffers extensive burns and goes into hiding. On 25 March 1930 he is sent off to a hideout in the interiors. On 26th March, a case is registered on his name under the Explosive Substances Act but he is not to be found.

24th, 25th and the 26th of March 1930: Colson spends this time in Chittagong reorganising the detective branch schedule. From 2 April 1930, Johnson is

scheduled to institute the revised system.

8 April 1930: A police patrol appears to be hunting for Tarakeshwar Dastidar (Phutu) and Ardhendu Dastidar who have suffered burn injuries one or two days before.

11 April 1930: The date of action i.e. 18 April 1930, is finalised.

18 April 1930: The Younies embark for Chittagong.

18 April 1930: The Chittagong Armoury Raid takes place.

19 April 1930: Alexander Burnett arrives in Chittagong as a member of the SVLH.

22 April 1930: John Younie arrives at Chittagong Circuit House having left the family at Barisal.

22 April 1930: The Battle of Jalalabad takes place.

22 April 1930: The Feni Incident takes place.

24th of April 1930: Amarendra Nandi is shot dead at Chittagong.

7 May 1930: The Kalarpol Encounter takes place.

10 May 1930: John Younie's family arrives at Chittagong.

May 1930: Lady Kathleen Tegart leaves for Britain. She returns in October.

May 1930: Ananta Lal Singh, Ganesh Ghosh, Jibon Ghoshal and Ananda Prasad Gupta arrive at Chandannagar.

25 June 1930: Ananta Lal Singh surrenders in Calcutta.

4 July 1930: Ananta Lal Singh arrives at Chittagong Jail.

12 July 1930: Lokenath Bal leaves Chittagong for Chandannagar.

24 July 1930: The Chittagong Armoury Raid Case begins.

25 August 1930: Bombs are thrown at Tegart's car in Calcutta.

29th August 1930: Lowman is gunned down in Dacca.

1 September 1930: The Chandannagar Encounter takes place. Jibon Ghoshal is martyred.

4 September 1930: Ananda Prasad Gupta, Ganesh Ghosh and Lokenath Bal arrive in Chittagong Jail.

11 September 1930: The Chittagong Armoury Raid Case is re-started. The trial is held within the Jail. Lal Mohan Sen withdraws his confession.

7 October 1930: Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev are sentenced to die.

10 October 1930: Ambika Chakraborty is arrested.

1 December 1930: Ram Krishna Biswas shoots Inspector Tarini Mukherji mistaking him for Mr Craig.

8 December 1930: Colonel Norman Skinner Simpson IG Prisons is shot dead by the BBD of the Bengal Volunteers.

6 February 1931: Motilal Nehru passes away.

5 March 1931: Gandhi-Irwin Pact is signed.

23 March 1931: Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev are hanged. Riots breakout in Cawnpore.

March 1931: Biren De is accidentally shot dead.

24 April 1931: Curfew is announced.

4 May 1931: Dorothy Younie returns to Britain with her children.

5 May 1931: Arms are discovered inside Chittagong Jail.

3 June 1931: Explosives are discovered and the dynamite conspiracy is uncovered.

4 August 1931: Ram Krishna Biswas is hanged.

30 August 1931: Haripada Bhattacharya shoots Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla.

23rd September 1931: The Rupee is devalued.

29 September 1931: Judgement of the Dynamite Conspiracy Case is read out.

6 October 1931: Two sloops of the Royal Indian Marine – the ‘Clive’ and the ‘Hindustan’ arrive in Chittagong.

3rd of November 1931: Nelson files his report on the riots in Chittagong.

9 November 1931: Johnson is posted out of Chittagong. Wright succeeds him. A battalion of the 5th Mahratta Light Infantry arrives from Calcutta in the first week of December along with two companies of Gurkhas from Shillong and a special force of armed police to flush out the rebels.

13 November 1931: Tegart accepts a post on the secretary of state’s council

30 November 1930: Sir Stanley Jackson promulgates the ‘Bloody Ordinance’.

1 December 1931: The Plenary Session of the Second Round Table Conference in London is held.

14 December 1931: Shanti and Suniti shoot C.B.J. Stevens dead.

14 December 1932: Indumati Singh and Kamini Dutt, the advocate, are arrested in Kumilla.

15th December 1931: Tegart signs his resignation from the IPC.

15 December 1931: Colson is appointed police commissioner of Bengal.

29 March 1932: Sir John Anderson succeeds Sir Stanley Jackson as governor of Bengal.

4th January 1932: The cruiser ‘Effingham’, the flagship of the East India Squadron enters harbour. The armed forces hold a show of strength.

23rd January 1932: BJ Shooter commits suicide.

30 January 1932: Last day of the Chittagong Raid Case Trial.

February 1932: Wright commits suicide.

1 March 1932: Verdict on the Chittagong Armoury Raid Case is given. Those that have been sentenced are removed from Chittagong immediately. The 2/8 Gurkha Regiment, with its officers - Angus Kennedy and Cameron, arrives and replaces the 5th Mahratta Light Infantry.

5 March 1932: John Younie leaves for Calcutta.

24th of March: John Younie embarks for Britain.

13 June 1932: The Dhalghat Encounter takes place. Nirmal Sen, Apurva Sen and Cameron lose their lives.

June 1932: Ordinance X is announced increasing the powers of the police and the army.

5 July 1932: Pritilata goes underground and Kalpana is placed under surveillance.

15 August 1932: Those sentenced in the Chittagong Armoury Raid Case are transferred to the Andamans.

23 September 1932: Kalpana Dutt is arrested for having left home.

24 September 1932: Pritilata leads the Pahartali Club Raid and then commits suicide.

1 November 1932: Tegart addresses the Royal Empire Society.

November 1932: Additional superintendent of police Mr Springfield arrives.

28 December 1932: Kalpana Dutt goes underground.

10 February 1933: Ambika Chakraborty is sentenced to death.

15 February 1933: Kalipada Mukherji is executed at Dhaka for the murder of Kamakhya Prasad Sen, the special magistrate at Munshigunj.

16 February 1933: Surjya Sen and Brajen Sen are captured at Gairala by the 2/9 Gurkha Regiment.

19 May 1933: Kalpana Dutt and Tarakeshwar Dastidar are captured at Gohira village by the 1/9 Royal Jats.

15 June 1933: The Chittagong Second Supplementary Armoury Raid Case begins.

14 August 1933: The verdict on the Chittagong Second Supplementary Armoury Raid Case is given. Surjya Sen and Tarakeshwar Dastidar are sentenced to death and Kalpana Dutt receives a life sentence.

7 January 1934: The Cricket Ground Encounter takes place.

8 January 1934: Traitor Netra Sen is murdered.

12 January 1934: Surjya Sen and Tarakeshwar Dastidar are hanged.

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Krishna Biswas' last letter into his diary.

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The scene of murder
of Mr Earnest Day by
Gopi Nath Saha on 12
January 1924

View of Dalhousie
Square after the attempt
on Sir Charles Tegart's
life on 25 August 1930



A splinter from the bomb had passed through the left rear door of Sir Charles Tegart's fiat. Inset: Two pieces of a bomb had penetrated the left rear door of Sir Charles Tegart's Fiat



Shop window of Messrs
Harold & Co, Dalhousie
Square, with a bullet hole



Shop window with bullet hole after
Dalhousie Square bomb attack



Sir Charles Tegart taking a crime scene photograph at Dalhousie Square



Col. Simpson's office



Col. Simpson's body



Benoy Krishna
Bose assassinated
Mr Lowman and
was also a part of
the BBD trio



Badal (Sudhir
Gupta) of the
BBD trio



Dinesh Gupta of
the BBD trio



Himangshu
Chakraborty



Manilal Dutt



Shaileshwar



Pritilata
Waddadar



Suhashini
Ganguli



Savitri
Chakraborty

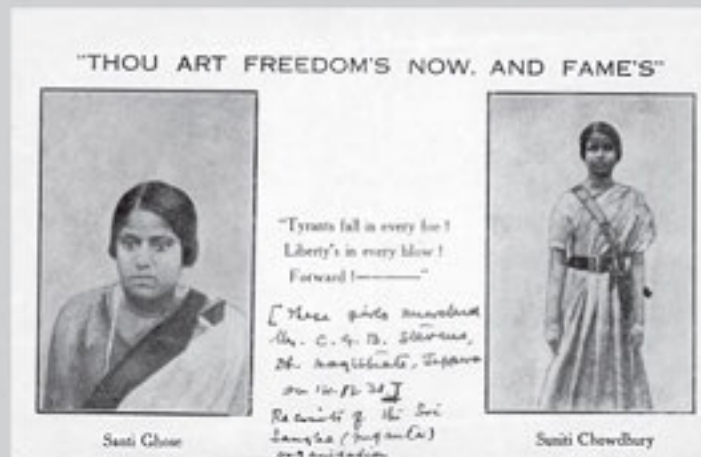


Sarat
Chandra Bose



Chattogram Jail ward that was used as a weapons store during the Dynamite Conspiracy

Commemorative leaflet praising Shanti and Suniti, the members of Sri Sangha, who shot dead C.B.J. Stevens



Body of Nirmal Sen who was martyred at Dhalghat on 13 June 1932



Dr Narain Chandra Roy with a cigarette



Convocation Hall,
Calcutta University,
after Bina Das's
attempt on Sir Stanley
Jackson's life

Police photograph of
a shelter in which two
rebels were arrested

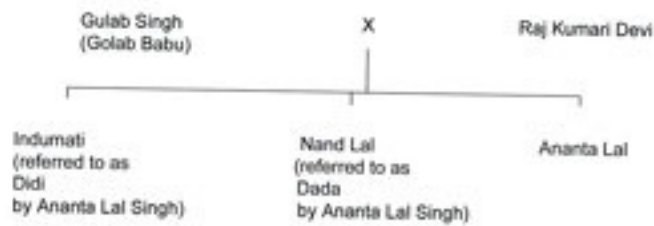


Treasury building with standard barbed
wire surrounding it



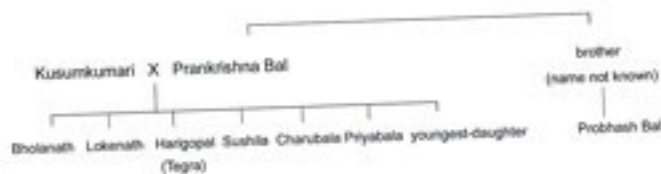
Police photograph of bombs
seized from rebels

SINGH FAMILY TREE

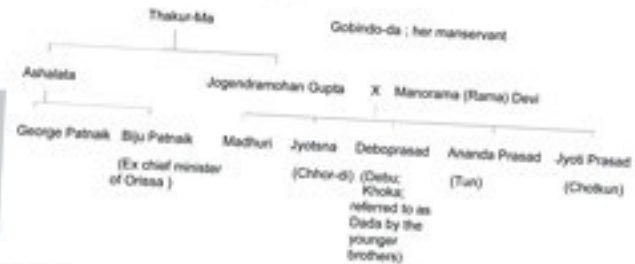


Ananta Lal Singh was introduced to the revolution by Pramod Ranjan Choudhury. Pramod moved on and joined Anushilan Party.

BAL FAMILY TREE

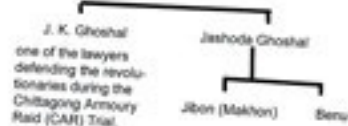


GUPTA FAMILY TREE



Deboprasad and Ananda were introduced and mentored by Ananta Lal Singh.

Jibon (Makhon) Ghoshal's Family Tree



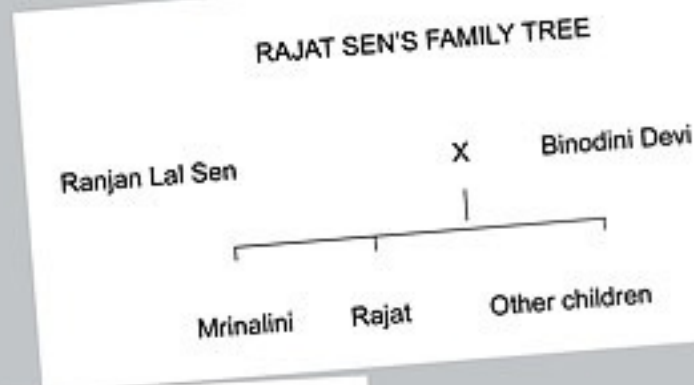
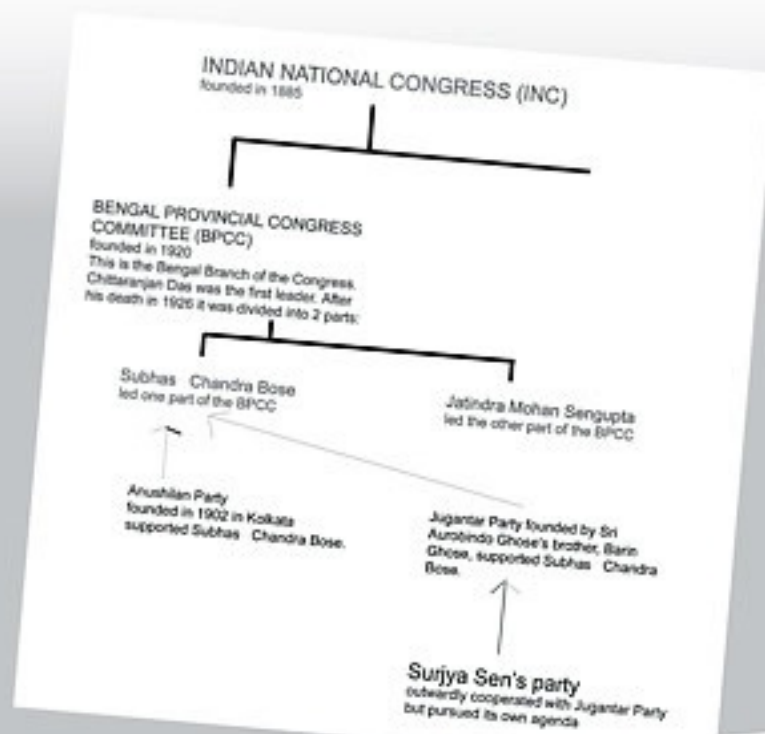
Jibon (Makhon) was introduced by Ananta Lal Singh

Benu was introduced by Ardhendu Guha under Ananta Lal Singh's instructions



TRIVIA: Simeran Ghosal who played Apu in Satyajit Ray's Aparajito was Jibon's first cousin.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Manoshi Bhattacharya is a former Indian Navy physician. Having discovered her passion for history and storytelling, she has to her credit Charting the Deep: A History of the Indian Naval Hydrographic Department, The Royal Rajputs: Strange Tales Stranger Truth and Chittagong: Summer of 1930. She has also translated a collection of novellas by Abanindranath Tagore titled Fables for All Ages. She currently works as a general physician in Gurgaon.

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